【著者】

舞阪洸
まいさか・こう

札幌に移住して１年半。だいぶ慣れた。冬の寒さにも降雪にも。札幌にはラノベ作家さんがたくさんいて心強い。とくにＭＦ文庫Ｊの作家さんが。

浜松出身→上京→大学卒業→弱小出版社勤務→ゲーム業界に転進→たまたまデビュー→その後、独立→現在に至る。札幌在住。

好き＝サッカーの試合を見る。
　　美味しいモノを食べる。
　　カラオケで歌う。
嫌い＝納豆。
　　待つこと、並ぶこと。
　　猛暑。

【イラストレーター】

よう太
ようた

最近安住の地千葉から眠らない街
THE・TOKYOに越してきたお絵描きさん。
イラストやライトノベルの挿絵・
ゲームの原画等を主に手がける。
今作への意気込みからか体重は
日々増加傾向だという（？）

カバーイラスト／よう太　装丁／團夢見

MF文庫 J
ま-02-01

落ちてきた龍王と滅びゆく魔女の国

舞阪洸

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落ちてきた龍王（ナーガ）と滅びゆく魔女の国

ここは、戦の絶えぬ世界。魔女が人に追われ、疎まれ、攻め滅ぼされんとする世界。ある日、その男は落ちてきた。“黒き森の魔女”ハリガンの前に――風呂の天井から。「な、な、な、なんじゃ貴様は!?」「乳だ！　しかもでかい！」――ただ滅びを待つ魔女の国に、突如現れた異界の男――「こっこら、勝手に人のぁあ乳をうぁぅ揉むなっんぁぁっっ！」「巨乳巨乳巨乳！」――記憶を失い、名に“龍王（ナーガ）”を持つ、奇妙な出で立ちの男――「おとおと男があねあね姉様のおっぱいをぉぉぉぉ!?」「落ち着けユウキ！」――かくて“戦才”と“魔法”は出逢い、運命の歯車は逆転をはじめる！艶やかに舞う戦乱無双ファンタジー、ここに開幕！

MF文庫 J 舞阪洸の本

落ちてきた龍王（ナーガ）と滅びゆく魔女の国
【イラスト：よう太】

落ちてきた龍王と
滅びゆく魔女の国

"黒き森の漆黒の魔女"

ハリガン

「……貴様は何者だ？
どこからどうやって
ここに来た？」

ハリガン一族の若き魔女

ユウキ

「男（おとこ）おとこオトコ男（オトコおとこオトコ男）おとこ
オトコ男（おとこオトコ）おおっ!?」

「しがみついて……いただくのはいいんですが、
そこはちょっと困ります」

「あぁあ、すまねえ。
っていうか、わざとじゃないからな？」

「で、ですから、その体勢で
力を入れないでと、言っているのに」

彼女が身をよじると、
落とされまいとして
ナーガは余計に力を入れ、
その結果――

「ちょ、駄目駄目駄目駄目ですって」

空中に浮かんだ呪符が
一斉に火を噴いた。

「炎と覇王と非業の使徒よ、
燃えて火となり黙して死となり、
行きて活きて逝きて、
念じ燃じ然じ、
炎の焔帝の加護と火后」

Ochitekita Ryuuou to Horobiyuku Majo no Kuni

Volume 1

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Prologue 1

On a large ledge that stretched from the bedrock, there was a young man standing up over the edge.

He seemed no more than 16 or 17 years of age, he had loose and disheveled black hair and was dressed in a strange outfit. A field hakama with spread cuffs tied with a thick belt and a flashy colored coat. None of them appeared to be from this world.

He was standing at the top of a smooth and vertical rock cliff without footholds, 300 or 400 meters above the ground, the view that stretched over the horizon was truly magnificent. A normal person would feel dizzy just standing there without even looking down.

Nevertheless, the young man was standing calmly at the ledge's edge staring at the area.

Within his wide field of vision, the undulated land spreads out as its light green and reddish brown mottled patterns intertwine together. The dark green masses that seemed to be forest can be seen from various places. If he raised his head around and gazed upward, over the vertical cliff to the land's deep plateau, he could see the high peaks that extended on the mountain range and continued to the mountain's feet.

A deep forest that covered the plateau. Thanks to the high density of the trees and the dark green leaves, if one would look down at the forest from the sky, it would have probably looked like black earth spreading out over the land.

The young man that was gazing at the view slowly raised his head.

Though it was faintly and blurry, he was able to have a good view of the snow-capped peaks in the distance. The ridge was cutting the skyline, separating the white earth and the blue sky.

The youth turned his head as some shadow appeared at the corner of his eye, seeing what appeared to be some kind of small winged dragon flying on the clear sky.

"It's already too late to be saying this, but this really is a strange world."

He still looked at the sky, following the black shadow as it goes away.

"Though I say that… I still cannot remember anything of my own world, but I know at least that there wasn't creatures like that flying in the sky."

At that moment.

A woman approached the youth's back.

The woman seemed to be in her early twenties. She had a long bluish black hair hanging down her back until her waist. She was wearing a long dark dress that wrapped her body till the ankles. The long dress had an opening that showed from both sides of the skirt, from which one could take a good look of the sexy woman's thighs.

The woman stopped before the man's back and called him after taking a glance at his back.

"What are you looking at, [Dragon King (Naga)]-sama?"

"I was just… wait, I told you already to stop calling me Naga-sama. Who do you think I am?"

"Other than Naga-sama, how else should I address the one with the title of [Dragon King]??"

Although a smile appeared on the woman's face, it didn't seem to have any kind of sarcasm in it.

But on the other side, the young man's face had a sarcastic smile.

"It's too grandiose. Firstly, I didn't know that my name had such an outrageous meaning like [Dragon King]."

"You say so but, aren't you going to unite this world? Unite it and bring a new order? Then I believe that being called [Dragon King(Naga)] is very appropriate for you."

"That's my intention, however, I haven't taken a single castle yet. If I begin to claim myself as Dragon King, then how should I call myself when I take over the world?"

"You can call yourself whatever you wished then, like Dragon conqueror or holy dragon emperor?"

"Uha ha ha!, those are certainly pretentious."

Although the youth laughed happily, the woman had a slightly amazed look on her face.

"You're the pretentious one. To unite the divided countries like this, to unite this torn in pieces world, is not something a normal person would think of. Every countries got their hands full just protecting their own territory, and for the sake of protecting their country they attack the neighboring ones. It's the same for humans and witches, to protect themselves humans try to destroy witches, and to protect ourselves we witches counterattack them. We have been keeping that unending cycle of wars for hundreds of years. It's already too late to coexist with each other… That's what everyone thinks."

"Then it's useless. If the only thing they do is protect the country, neither the country nor its people will advance forward. If somebody doesn't take the challenge, the world won't change. If nobody is up to the challenge…"

The man turned to face the woman and smiled boldly.

“Then I will take it.”

“I’m totally surprised by that way of thinking. How did a young man like you get this sort of idea?”

“I don’t know how either but, I feel that it’s something I must do. Though I wouldn’t say it is… an obsession, it’s like a voice is resounding somewhere in my heart, saying that the torn world must be united.”

“I wonder if that secret is concealed within your lost memories.”

“That might be possible.”

Once again, the man gazed upon the mysterious widening scenery before him.

The vast world.

The abrupt nature.

The many countries.

The diverse humans.

The ones called witches.

The long conflict between humans and witches.

As well as the continuing conflicts between humans.

Can this man really unite this world?

Can he stop the long conflict between humans and witches that had been going for centuries?

To put an end to the people’s power struggle that continued for hundreds of years?

“I will do it.”

The young man boldly laughed.

“It doesn’t matter what kind of world is out there, I was born to unite the world.”

The youth stopped smiling and looked at the woman’s face with a serious expression.

“So Harrigan Halliway Haindora, the jet black witch of the black forest, would you and the others witches fight alongside me?”

“That’s our intention. Though our group lacks on strength, we are prepared to give all our power to help your ambition. In any case, it’s the light of hope that shines upon our future as we roll down on a slope facing extinction. If we realize your ambition, we can secure our future “

“I hope so.”

“To begin with, you saved our lives, so we must return that debt. Didn’t you say it before [to certainly pay a night’s stay and a meal debt][1]? Now it’s our turn to pay it.”

“For a witch you’re too honorable.”

“I’m honorable because I’m a witch. And in the first place, it’s you that risked your life fighting for us because of [a meal and a bed debt][2], would be the one too honorable.”

The young man, remembered what he did, just happily laughed.

The youth continued laughing for a while, and soon turned his body.

“Well, let’s go back Harrigan. It’s getting a little cold here, we will catch a cold if we stay too long.”

The young man and the witch departed and soon disappear into the cave’s entrance.

A gust of wind blowed over the abandoned rock ledge, making a melancholic sound that resembled the winter wind whistling through a fence .

These are the warring states.

A world where war never ends.

A world covered in the tumults of war.

A world covered by the clouds of war.

Where the ravages of war never cease.

Where the drums of war never stop.

Where battlefields spread over the world.

In which what awaits on a man’s path could be victory or defeat, and also life or death.

Can this man really save the witches that are on the brink of extinction?

Translator and reference note:

[1]: It's from a japanese expression, it means to repay a debt of gratitude.

[2]: Same as the first note.

Prologue 2

There was a small lake in the forest.

Although if you looked at its scale over the shore, it would be more appropriate to call it a pond or bog. But its inhabitants called this place…

Ryuujinko, the lake where the dragon god lives.

The water of the oval lake was cold and clear, it wouldn't become muddy even if it rains. Therefore, It is said that the water springs from somewhere at the bottom of the lake.

Though it's a place that people rarely approached, people still come. Some of those few, said that they had seen strange things at that place.

Someone said that he seen a foreign city at the bottom of the lake.

Another said that the lake's water was stirring even though there was no wind.

Another said that he seen a dragon swimming there.

And another said that he seen a foreign girl in the lake.

As those rumors spread around, the few people who approached the lake suddenly stopped coming.

Today as always, that forest wrapped in deep silence, the Ryuujinko had a quiet appearance with the lake's surface shining from the sunshine like a mirror.

At the lake's shore, there was a young man standing.

The young man was probably around 16 or 17 years, and was wearing an strange outfit.

He had loose and disheveled hair, wore a pipe hakama of pongee that you cannot find around here with a katana on his waist, and also a coat colored with flashy designs.

The young man stepped inside the lake shore, not caring at all about wetting his legs as he looked into the lake.

"A dragon lives here? How does it live in such clear water? In the first place, the bottom of the lake is completely visible. Where the hell is the dragon? I came a long way here expressly for this, but it turned out to be a fake."

As the young man spit out his displeasure, he bent to pick up a pebble that fell to his feet and aimed at the lake to throw it.

At that moment, the lake's water began to swell even though there's no wind, and the ripples approached the shore.

The sound of the ripples breaking in grew stronger.

"What!? Waves so suddenly!? It can't be, is there really something here!? "

The young man threw away the pebble and once again looked into the lake. A view he had never seen before propped on the surface of the lake.

"W… what is, that…"

Dense stone buildings.

A plaza covered with stone pavement.

An extravagant palace with pinnacles.

"What is that!? A town!? No, but those buildings…"

In front of the young man, the view inside the lake completely changes.

A thick and dense dark forest.

A surprisingly thick and tall giant tree.

Beasts that he never seen squirmed in the forest.

"What on earth am I looking at!? No… What is it showing me?"

The view changed again.

And again, and again, and again.

The next thing projected in the water was a plain tree building, with the smoke of cooking rising from it.

And the shade of a beautiful girl's face somewhere.

The young man never seen any kind of appearance or clothes like these before.

"A mirage!? No, I never heard of a mirage that projects underwater. What the hell is that!?"

As the young man steps inside the lake charmed at the spectacle, the waves that broke in the lakeshore suddenly grew.

“Uwaaah!?”

It isn’t the sea, it’s just a little pond.

The energy of the rip current was terrifyingly big, the young man was pulled underwater as if a huge invisible arm had caught his leg.

“Wha… what is going… gaah.”

The young man disappeared in the waves.

Suddenly, the lake calmed down, the waves stopped and the surface became like a mirror once again.

Nothing was heard, not the sound of the wind or the chirps of the birds. It’s a strange calm, as if the lake had absorbed all the sounds. The small lake is wrapped with the same silence it had before.

And for the young man who disappeared…

The lake’s depth was only a few meters, and the water was so transparent that the bottom was totally visible. And yet, there was no sign of the young man in the water or at the bottom of the lake.

“Young master… Where are you?” Young masteeer.”

the voice of one of the young man’s retainer called for him?

“Young masteer… Do you hear me? Young masteeer.”

The voice’s owner drew closer to the lake little by little.

“The young master, where on earth did he go leaving his retainers aside. he couldn’t have went to the lake by himself.”

An elderly man approached the lake, and bent his body towards the lake a little, and took a timidly peek.

“It can’t be. No matter how unreasonable the young master is, he wouldn’t have dived into the lake where the dragon god lives alone. So… Where did the young master go? “

The elder retainer of about 50 years clicked his tongue with a frustrated expression.

“Damn it young master. Going around without retainers with such rundown clothes, that’s why you’re called a fool by everyone.”

Letting out a sigh, the elder retainer turned and walks away from the lake.

“Young masteer! If you’re there please respond! Young masteeeer!”

Chapter 1 – The man who fell in the bath house

1

There was a group consisting solely of women, who lived inside the ‘black forest’ that extended till the remote borders.

People called them ‘witches’. In other words, they were beings with different abilities.

From the perspective of humans that believed in the one absolute god, who ruled over the overwhelming majority of people, it was clear that witches who worshipped the protection of hundreds of divine beings were heretics. For that reason the witches were detested and feared. While feeling fear toward the witches, they held feelings of envy and jealousy against those who possessed special abilities, unlike them.

Certainly, not being compatible with each other, they continued to fight each for a long time.

Witches, who were once proud of numerous comrades, as well as holding the power capable to influence the world, were now declining in number. It seemed as though they were slowly walking along their path of destruction. While aware of their inferior position, they wouldn’t try looking for any fights. Nevertheless, were their territory to be invaded , they wouldn’t hesitate to fight, even if it meant for their household to decline.

Because the frequency in the resistance against witches lowered for a while, many of them could live peacefully in a place far away from the city. However, it was only temporary due to the conflict between fellow human countries that had increased.

Once the great war, which involved many countries and numerous lives concluded, their eyes would return to the witches. It was just the natural course of action for the statesmen of the countries, which surrounded the land of witches, to consider the extermination of them.

The surrounding countries were now preparing for the extermination of witches.

While the church, under the pretext of sweeping witches from this world, supported the assault on them by each country, they schemed the plan of assassination the leader of witches by sending assassins.

Despite such actions taking places, the conflict between vassals and feudal lords for authority wouldn’t cease.

There were often times when the conflict would grow on a national scale, resulting in a new war.

While the conflict between fellow humans continued, they would still manage to steadily reduce the territory of the witches.

Despite the witches having high combat abilities, it was next to impossible for them to battle against hundreds and thousands of deployed units. As a result, while killing a huge number of the enemy's forces, they would end up carrying out a tactical retreat without gaining a victory.

In the end, the vicious cycle of hatred from humans continued together with losing territory and comrades..

Even now witches were followed by the chain of defeats.

It seemed as though, there was no peaceful place for them in this world.

2

There were several groups among witches.

If presently described, these groups were close to the concept of 'a clan' . Several of these clans gathered and formed a loose alliance, which was pointed out and referred by the humans as 'the country of witches'.

There were no men among their clans, as it consisted only of women, who were born as witches with special abilities. Witches wouldn't add anyone besides those they considered as witches. Therefore, it was also known as the country of women.

One of the witches, who was the leader of one of the clans, was Harrigan Halliway Haindora.

Her household built a residence deep inside the black forest.

Apart from Harrigan, there were several other clans of witches ,who settled inside the black forest, nevertheless, hers used to be an influential one.

That's right, it 'used to be' influential.

Due to their topographical location, they would be the first to be on the frontline, resulting in the decline of her clan. And once it declined, it was inevitable for them to lose their authority as a result. Because of that, Harrigan deeply suffered that lost as the leader.

While worrying about the future of her family, she immersed herself inside the open air bath made from the welling hot spring, which was located in the hilly area, inside the forest.

The bath house was a simplistic wooden-made arbor-styled one built in the free area, which was cutting through the loosely sloping land made from the small hills.

In the center of the bath house, which was transparent from 3 sides, a long and narrow wooden-made bathtub was placed on the wooden floor. The hot water, which pumped from the gushing source nearby, filled the bathtub as usual.

Inside the bathtub filled with hot water, which gave out a little bit of sulphurous odour, laid Harrigan with her graceful limbs.

What attracted one's attention from Harrigan's body, which was nakedly submerged inside the tub, was her blueish-black long hair, her bulging chest, the tight waist and her big buttocks. Indeed, one could say it was the figure of a full-fledged woman. The sign of her femininity was also seen between her groins, which was thickly covered with black bush.

Harrigan, who remained submerged inside the bathtub, stretched her limbs, and let out a small sigh, which she could care less whether it was heard or not.

How should we reach an agreement with humans? Or should we completely abandon that idea? Harrigan thought about it. Nevertheless, however much she would ponder about that, there was no sign for the future prospects, nor any hope for a better future…

Should she just wait calmly for their slow annihilation?

Or should they die magnificently in an all-or-nothing war?

There seemed to be only these two choices.

Raising her head, Harrigan shifted her sight toward the other side.

On the one side of the bath house, there was a small undressing room, nevertheless, the three remaining were transparent with no walls, despite there being beams. Because of that, Harrigan was able to look out over the surrounding.

Looking down from the hill, there was a thickly green virgin forest, which was receiving the dazzling sunray of the early summer, extending beneath one's eyes. On the other side, where the virgin forest, also called by people – the black forest, ended, there was a stretched land inhabited by humans. The land ruled by humans was wide and in comparison with the one of witches, it had a larger population. In addition to that, the land governed by witches was gradually reducing together with their population.

(Whether we fight or not, is it extinction that await us? Or perhaps fate? If so, then fighting magnificently and vanishing in the same way should be a brief entertainment…no.)

Harrigan looked at the young witch next to her.

(Fighting recklessly will only result in the death of my daughters. It would still be better for me alone, but taking along these daughters, there's no way for that.)

– Yuuki.

The girl, whose Harrigan voice reached, raised her head.

– What's the matter, Harrigan-nee?

Despit the girl calling her by 'Sis', they were not actual sisters. Following their customs, the young witches would call Harrigan, who was their leader, such as Ane-sama, Aneue, Nee. On the other hand, Harrigan would call the young witches, and at the same time the members of this household, as her daughters' very often.

Harrigan beckoned the witch.

– Come, enter together with me.

The wooden-made bathtub was big, so even if both of them entered, it wouldn't be that tight.

– Is it fine? It seemed like you were immersed in your thoughts, so won't I become a bother?

– That's fine, that's fine. Come

-Well then, sorry for my rudeness.

The girl stood up, taking off her clothes and becoming nude.

Her pair of chest hills were neither small nor big, they were of the beautiful size and shape, suitable at her age. The tips of her breasts were of cute pink color, her shoulders width was narrow, her bottom's overhang was a bit moderate, her groins area's shade was dim. In contrast to Harrigan, she had more girlish figure.

What caught the attention was her long shining hair tied up into two ponytails. This too, was contrasting to Harrigan's bluish black hair.

The girl named Yuuki stepped in with her leg without any restraint and sat in the corner.

– Don't just sit there in the corner. Hey, come here.

Raising her upper body, Harrigan stretched out her right arm and reached Yuuki's only to pull her toward herself. She followed straight away without showing any resistance

Making her sit inside the area of Harrigan's stretched legs, Harrigan wrapped Yuuki's two chest hills with both of her palms.

– Ha…Harri-nee….

So as to check their softness, Harrigan moved her palms while kneading.

– No…sto…. ahn.

(I want to give these daughters a future. I want them to have hope. This is as well the part of my duty, me who is the head of this family. But, just what can I do…?)

While contemplating about that, she gently moved both of her palms.

Nevertheless, however hard she pondered, there was no idea, which would break in the deadlock, crossing her mind.

– Ha…Harri-nee…I can't take it anymore… aah..

Hm? Returning back to herself, Harrigan stopped her palms.

(Oops, being immersed in my thoughts, I began squeezing them too seriously.)

Having a red face, Yuuki, who felt her body had lost its strength, entrusted her back on Harrigan's chest.

(Fumu. But, what should I do? I don't want to sacrifice this cute daughters of mine, but…despite saying so, without fighting we will be eventually driven away from this place. Once this happens, we will go further into the depth of the forest, ending in the world of only humans. Wouldn't that be the same as falling into ruin?)

Feeling Yuuki's body on her chest, she looked up into the space with her thoughtful face.

Suddenly, the bath house shook.

The space distorted in a swaying manner.

-W, what's happening!?

Harrigan, who took back her face, looked at the sky through the transparent side of the building.

Before one could notice, the sky was covered with dark clouds.

(What's going on!? Just a while ago, it was a clear blue sky expanding!)

Harrigan could sense that something unusual was happening. Nevertheless, she couldn't tell what it was.

Suddenly the raindrops began to hit the roof of the bath house.

The falling rain, changed at once into a heavy rainfall, Thunders together with lightings were running through the sky, which was dim, like at the time of dusk.

– What's this heavy downpour!? Doesn't it feel as though the bottom of the heaven fell out? Just what an earth… don't tell me that this could be the sign of the water dragon manifesting?

Seeing the eerie sight, Harrigan's body began to shake tremble as well. She could understand that Yuuki was shaking as well from her back.

Immediately after that, a voice was heard from somewhere.

– ≠◇▼ ☪=★!?

Even though there were only Yuuki and Harrigan, someone else's voice was heard. Rather than hearing the voice, Harrigan wondered whether it was something echoing inside her mind. And then, it was the voice of a man. Saying that, it was none other that a human man in the vicinity.

(Impossible, this shouldn't be even possible.)

Searching for the source of the voice, Harrigan run with her eyes in all the directions, however, she couldn't find the figure nor feel its presence.

I was probably just seeing things – Harrigan nodded as if convincing herself.

So as not to let any stray people nor the spies enter the village and the fortification, or rather, the residing territory of the witches, a barrier was put around the village. Here as well, it should be not possible for any common person to break through the barrier and pass into their territory. In addition to that, by covering their presence it shouldn't let anyone approach this close, not even one chance on ten thousand, but on a million chances.

However, there was a voice. certainly it was heard. It was neither mishearing nor one's imagination.

They couldn't understand the meaning of the words, nevertheless, it was a powerful and high voice,which reached their ears.

– There's a m-man, a man. (trembled voice.)

As the proof, Yuuki, the man-hater, lost her composure. Her sensitivity toward men is greater than anyone's.

– Where, where is the man? (trembled)

Standing up while being completely naked, she looked on her left and right, and again at her right, moving her body and neck hurriedly.

– Calm down Yuuki.

Despite Harrigan calling out to her, Yuuki turned around her eyes and revolved with her body.

(Good grief, as expected, Yuuki's hate for men is endless.)

Looking up at the confused Yuuki, who was in front of her eyes, she smiled wryly.

– Still, the voice before, just what on earth was….

Taking off the smile on her face Harrigan looked over one more time as if searching for something.

Suddenly a man descended from the sky.

Such way of saying wasn't exact. More accurately, the man fell from the from the ceiling of the bath house.

The descended man dropped into the bathtub making the water splashed.

– What!?

Harrigan opened widely her eyes.

The fallen man did the same.

– A man a man man a man.

Yuuki too, opened widely her eyes and froze.

Harrigan had her attention caught by the man.

It was a young man, with an strange attire that she had never seen or heard of before.

The man looked up dumbfoundedly in the midair, soon coming back to himself. He moved his body timidly using his head.

Harrigan's sight and the man's met each other.

-Wh… who are you? From where and how did you manage to come here?

– **★◇?**

The man responded to Harrigan using some sort of language, nevertheless, she couldn't understand anything.

(Hm? Could it be that my words doesn't go through to him? These strange clothes, could he be a foreigner? If so, it doesn't seem unreasonable, but…)
Regarding the unfamiliar clothes and language, if one were to think he's a foreigner, one could only agree on that. Nevertheless, you couldn't agree with the fact that someone appeared all of a sudden in a bath. There was no explanation for that.

As Harrigan observed him, the man raised his right hand and pointed at her.

– **☆■▽×≠♀♿§★→∋**

Harrigan frowned her eyebrows.

(I don't understand at all what he's saying. At least, it doesn't seem like he's an assassin send to kill me by the church.)

Interpreting his words, the man said this

– **Breasts! And they're huge!**

Being completely soaked, the man sidled up to Harrigan.

– W, w, w, what are you doing!?

Being overwhelmed by the man's vigorous attitude and look, Harrigan tried to step back, nevertheless, the edge of the bathtub was in her way.

The man extended his right hand and, grab! – He tightly grabbed her breast.

– Aah?

– **I've never seen such splendid pair of breasts!**

– Don't grab them that forcefully!

– **What a size, what a smoothness, what an elasticity.**

-H.. hey, don't just aah… grab a person's aah… breasts at your own convenience aah!

Hearing Harrigan's scream-like, angry-like, and yet charming voice, Yuuki, who was stiff from being dumbfounded, came back to herself.

– What's the matter Harrigan-nee.

What entered her eyes, which looked down at her own feet, was a man with a mysterious hairstyle and wrapped in clothes that she had never seen before, using both of his hands to grab Harrigan's voluptuous breasts. It was a dreadful scene.

– A man a man a man is groping H-Ha-Harri-nee's br…!?

Yuuki's hair was squirming as its color became darker

– Hey Yuuki! Calm down!

– **Big breasts! Big breasts! Big breasts!**

– You too, calm down! And what are you trying to say!? Speaking of which, stop groping my breasts!

– Kill, kill, kill, kill the man.

– Argh! I said calm down!

Harrigan's long and blueish black hair lifted in the air from the hot bath.

Harrigan's hair, which became a thick bundle swung vigorously.

Whack.

Harrigan's hair gave out a dull sound as it knocked Yuuki's back of head. Her neck folded diagonally.

With her eyes turning white, the girl lost her consciousness and fell in a position, which resembled her upper body hooked on the edge of the bathtub.

– **I'll touch them, rub them, lick them, bury in them!**

– I don't know what you're saying, but you too calm down!

Whaack!

Once again her bundled hair swung, hitting the man in the back of his head, from which the man's eyes turned white. Its hardness was unbelievable for a hair..

Losing the power from his own body, the man released his hands from Harrigan's chest and lost his consciousness while falling on the top of her body.

– Just what's with this man?

Harrigan muttered while gazing sternly at the exhausted young man with an unusual clothing and look, hanging on her body.

– I've never heard before the language that he speaks, I wonder if he's a foreigner… whether that's the case or not, nobody should be able of breaking through my barrier without me noticing it. There should be no one able to get this close without me noticing it. It would be a different case for a witch like me, but at least, not for any human living in this world. If so, does it means that this guy came form another world? So he's not a foreigner, but rather someone from a different world?

Harrigan shifted slightly her sight.

Next to the man, the eyes of the naked Yuuki turned white as she lost her consciousness.

(Good grief, I'll leave the inquiry of this guy's true identity for later. First, I'll have to take care of Yuuki so that she doesn't go berserk, as once she wakes up, she will try to kill this man. I don't know who this guy is, so it's more reason to not let Yuuki murder him. Assuming he's really fell from another world….)

Once again Harrigan caught the man in her sight.

A man with a weird hairstyle.

A man wearing queer clothing.

A man, whose words are unfamiliar.

A man that suddenly fell from the sky.

(I wonder if he knows of any way to save us from our crisis.)

Harrigan stood up from the bathtub. The hot water, which covered her smooth skin, turned into droplets while slipping off.

Her eyes, which looked down at the man, stopped at his waist.

– This guy's sword has a strange appearance, doesn't it? Well, rather than the appearance, If he wakes up only to swing at us with that sword, it will be troublesome. Should I take it out?

Bending her waist, Harigan reached her hand toward his left lower back.

– What? It's inserted in just a sash? It's quite a careless way of wearing a sword. But.

As Harrigan raised, she stared at the specialized weapon, which she took from the man's waist.

– It's slightly curved. Indeed, this isn't a shape one would see in this vicinity. It's even different from the scimitar used in the eastern part of this world. Interesting. Still, how do you pull this out? Could it be, like this?

While Pulling out the man's sword, Harrigan encountered some trouble.

– Its out.

She raised the blade, which was radiating in silver color, in front of her eyes.

– It's quite heavy. The blade is too, thick. And it looks beautiful more than anything. It feels as though my sight is attracted by it…but, it isn't the right moment to admire. I've to deal quickly with this guy and Yuuki.

Once Harrigan put back the sword into its scabbard, she placed it casually on the wooden floor. After that, she turned around and walked toward the exit to open the door.

Carrying a clothing basket, which was inside the small room, Harrigan returned to the bath house. Once she kneeled down and put the basket on the floor, she curled up the clothes inside the basket, so as to grab them.

Remaining in that posture, she used her index finger nail to cut a single string of her long hair.

As soon as she transferred her magic power into that string, it immediately became stiff and stretched straightforwardly.

Harrigan thrusted the clothes, which she held in her left hand, with the hair string that turned into a long needle. Once it pierced through, her clothes began to squirm like a living object.

Her wriggling clothes jumped off her hand and descended onto the bath floor, squirming while gradually changing its shape. Finally, it took the form of human.

– Your master Harrigan Halliway Haindora orders you. Go and call my daughters – Ais and Lela.

Her clothes, which took the shape of human, bowed down toward her, just like a human being. Then, it jumped out from the bath house.

3

– Ane-sama, it's me Aisu.

– It's Le-la.

Guided by Harrigan clothes, the two young witches – Ais Aishuria Haindora and Lela Laylah Haindora, who run up the hill to arrive, bowed down toward Harrigan as she stood naked on the bath house floor.

The daughters of Harrigan, in order to show that they're part of her clan, they have the same third name.

– What's the matter?

Putting a smile on her face, the witch with a large build asked.

– Sorry for calling you out deliberately. I need you to help.

– Yeah, don't worry.

The two of them gave the impression of being around their mid-to-late teens.

The one with the large build and pleasant smile was Ais. In comparison with Lela, she was taller, and the parts which should come out on her body have a great volume. She gave the aura of a grow-up.

On the other hand, Leyla's physique wasn't much different from Yuuki….rather than that, the parts which should come out were less than Yuuki's. After all, if truth be told, she was tiny breasted.

However, both Ais and Lela wore clothes which exposed lots of skin. In Lela's case, she had some kind of short skirt made of countless amulets coiling around her waist which standed out.

– I want you to carry Yuuki.

Harrigan sticked out her right index finger and pointed it toward her feet.

– Just what have Yuuki done again…

While Making a wry smile, Ais moved her eyes outside the bathtub. Once she noticed that it wasn't just Yuuki, her breath was taken away.

– Wait, is that a man?!

Lela, who had the same expression until now, as well raised her eyebrows with a twitch.

– Could he be an assassin sent by the chu-rch?

The hair of the two girls shaked because of the goosebumps.

– No, don't panic. It's nothing like that. Probably.

-…..Huh?

Ais and Lela cocked their heads in puzzlement.

I think the novel says: Harrigan explained quickly all that happened until now.

– So something like that happened?

Ais opened widely her eyes while looking at both the man and Harrigan.

On the other hand, the daughter named Lela didn't seem to show any surprisement.

Speaking with a monotonous tone

– It's hard to believe, but there's no way for ane-sama to li-e. And it's a fact that there's a man lying down he-re. If so, I have no choice but to a-ccept it.

As if trying to convince herself, she murmured that.

Trying to calm herself down with a deep breath, Ais faced toward Harrigan.

– Then, what should we do, ane-sama?

– In any case, we can only inquiry information from this guy. That's why I called you, thinking that you would help me carrying both of them. Lela will help to establish a mutual communication with this guy.

There was a reason for what Harrigan is saying. Lela possess a magic that allows communication with a foreigner that only speak its own language.

– Understood, but…

While nodding, Lela cocked her head in puzzlement..

– It would be different story if he was a foreig-ner, but, it's the first time for me to establish a mutual understanding with someone who comes from a diffe-rent world.

– Give it a try and if it fails, we will think of some other way at that time.

– Got tha-t.

– Ais, I'll entrust those two to you.

– Yes, ane-sama.

Ais grabbed with both hands the body of the unconscious Yuuki, who was completely naked, and lightly lifted it. She put Yuuki on her right shoulder. Then, while holding Yuuki's body, she bent her waist and did the same with the man drenched in water.

It's true that compared to Lela or Yuuki, Ais had a bigger build. Nevertheless, she wasn't a giant. In fact, Harrigan was taller than her. Judging by her looks, her muscles didn't seen to be specially developed and yet, that physical strength.

Aisu seemed to be the owner of a monstrous strength, which one wouldn't guess from her appearance.

– Where should I carry them ane-sama?

Ais asked casually as if not sensing the weight of two people.

– For the time being, carry them to my room. I don't want cause to cause any turmoil. Carry them silently so as not to bring other daughters' attention.

– Understood.

– And Lela, won't you please carry the sword lying over there?

Lela looked at where Harrigan's finger was pointing.

– Th-at? It has an strange shape, isn't i-t?

– You don't know it either?

– It's my first time seeing i-t.

– It was sashed to the man's waist.

Frowning her eyebrows, Lela directed her look at the man carried by Ais.

– He had a sword sash-ed. Then, isn't he an assas-sin?

– No, he's not, probably.

(That's because, that guy went to grab my breasts without showing any sign of drawing the sword.)

Naturally, Lela didn't know about the man conducting such action, she couldn't understand on what basis Harrigan was putting her assumption, but if she says it's not, then it probably does mean so. For the time being, Lela buried her hatchet.

– Well then, go ahead, I'll catch up with you soon.

– Yes, ane-sa-ma.

After Harrigan saw the two leave the bath house, the puppet familiar turned back to be normal clothes and then she put them on with a calm attitude.

4

Harrigan made Ais lay down the man on the bed inside her room, and the naked Yuuki was rolled on a thick cloth spread on the floor and had a bed cover put on.

– Lela, please carry that sword to my study and put it where no one can see.

Once Lela left, Harrigan moved her look toward Yuuki, who was rolling inside the bad sheet.

(There's a fear that Yuuki might rampage once she wakes up. It can't be helped.)

Harrigan ordered Ais to wrap Yuuki's body into a roll using a thin cloth and in addition to that, a rope that was prepared. What's more, so as to make sure that the other witches don't hear Yuuki screaming, they put a mouth gag on Yuuki's mouth. Harrigan still didn't want to expose the man's presence.

Due to the riot in the bath house, Harrigan's body became cold. Because the man's clothing were damp, there was a risk of him catching a cold. Harrigan kindled the fireplace, so as try to warm up the room.

Harrigan rubbed the fire-igniting stones together and triggered them to ignite. Once she threw them into the fireplace, the flame burned up red inside of it.

She run her sight over the man with a glance.

(Even if his clothes are wet, there's probably no way for us to strip him at at our convenience.)

Harrigan didn't lack the curiosity to see the naked young man, nevertheless, she was restraining herself in front of Ais.

(In the first place, even if we can strip the man, we have no spare clothes for him, and we can't leave him naked until his clothes get dry. Despite that, we don't know if people from another world can catch a cold.)

The room inside the wooden-made building gave out a simplistic impression. One could see documents, the writing desk and the chair put in the corner. On top of that, there was a bookshelf placed near the wall. One could say that all of these were handmade wooden goods, which used lumbered trees from the forest.

On that bookshelf, there were paper books lined up, which was rare in this period.

The paper was a high grade product, which was passed in no time from the eastern world. What's more, in this period, there were no printing machines, therefore, the books were copied by hand. Because of that, it was not possible to mass produce them. that's another reason why paper books were precious..

Other than the desk and the bookshelf, as expected, there were only a wooden-made bed and a small side table placed inside the room.

On top of the bed lay the unconscious young man in his strange clothes, who was stretched longly on it. Yuuki, who was roundly tied up and wrapped in the thick cloth, lay on the floor while naked.

Seeing the impossible scene, which unfolded inside her room, Harrigan felt as if getting a headache. At the same time, she herself felt the urge to laugh.

Returning to the room after a while, Lela occupied the front of the table while writing something on a small piece of paper.

Ais and Harrigan sat at the brought stools and watched silently Lela's work.

The sound of the blazing firewood reverberated inside the room as its air warmed up.

Once Lela finished her preparations, Harrigan made Ais use the prepared smelling salts for the man to smell. Without having to wait, the man woke up.

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After the man lifted his body, he faced toward Harrigan while speaking to her as if pressing for an answer.

– As expected, I don't understand anything. Well, wouldn't that be obvious? Despite that, this is a mysterious language for one's ears.

– ☥☤△¶#>≡⇔∩↓◆☆*♂♀🗲?

– Well, calm down… even if I say that, you probably won't understand.

Raising her right hand, Harrigan expanded its palm in front of the man's eyes.

For now, stop talking – such was the meaning of her action, but, did the man sensed her intention? Once he closed his mouth. he scratched his head as if saying 'good grief'.

(Hmm. He seems to have quite guts.)

Harrigan became dumbfounded and at the same time, filled with admiration at the man's defiant like attitude.

(How can he remain this calm under such circumstances? Is this guy a big-shot or just a fool?)

Not letting her thoughts leak out, Harrigan shifted her sight to Lela.

– Are the preparations done?

– Yes, ane-sa-ma.

Harrigan, who received two amulets presented by Lela, put up one of them in front of her eyes and pressed it against her own forehead. Even if she released her hand, the charm would stick to it.

Holding one more amulet in the left hand, she presented it to the man while showing her forehead with her empty right hand. She tapped her own charm with the index finger.

You too, follow my example and put this on your forehead. – is what she wanted to say, nevertheless, the man seemed to understand her as he received the amulet and slammed it vigorously on his forehead. Just like in case of Harrigan, the amulet wouldn't fall despite him released his hand.

She slowly talked toward him.

– Do you, understand my words? Who are you? Where did you came from?

Pressing the amulet against his forehead, the man frowned his eyebrows. Nevertheless, he finally raised his head and spoke.

– ★※∪……words……▲↓……are becoming….understandable?

– Oh, did he comprehend it?

Harrigan looked at Lela, who waited next to her.

– As expected of Lela.

– Hmph.

Lela smiled slightly while puffing out her tiny chest.

– Well, this much is nor-mal.

– Ara. Even though you weren't sure whether it would work or not.

Ais teased her from the side.

– I was just being mo-dest.

– Well, let's leave it like that.

Hmm.

Lela stared at Ais

– Hey, won't you be quiet?

Being warned by Harrigan the two of them draw back their necks.

– Well then, how about now? Do you understand what I'm saying?

– Yes, I do… but, this is an strange sensation. It feels like your words are reverberating directly in my head. Is it because of this?

Using his right palm, the man tapped the amulet on his forehead.

– Thats right, if you consider it as an interpretation device foreign languages, then it should be fine.

– Wow, I wonder if it's more convenient than strange. Well, speaking of strange…

After turning back his head, the man shifted in turns his sight over Harrigan, Ais and Lela.

– You're also strange. Your hair color, skin color, eyes pupil, and then your clothes. I have never seen anything like it.

– For us too, it's the first time that we see someone like you with that strange attire. So, who are you and from where are you from? How did you came here?

– Me? I'm… I'm… Hmm? I'm… Who am I?

– No, that's what I'm asking.

The man folded his arms and, Hmm, started to make low groans.
– I don't know. I mean, I can't remember from where I am or who I am.

Releasing his folded arms, the man used both of his hands to scratch his loose hair.

– I am…my name is….damnit, what is this unpleasant feeling…

Harrigan, Lela and Ais, all of them looked each other's face.

– Ane-sama, could it be that this man, has lost his memory?

Harrigan breathed out a sigh.

– If that's the case, then he doesn't know anything. now, what to do?

– No… Naga…

The man muttered as if moaning.

– Naga? What's that?

Being asked by Harrigan, the man released both of his hands from his face and turned toward her with a troubled expression.

-I have the feeling… That it's a part of my name but… other than that, I can't remember anything else. Just who am I?
Harrigan pondered about the man's words while hiding her own surprise.

(Naga… as in dragon king? Is he serious about that being part of his name? Or is this man just a lunatic?)

– Well, leaving my matter aside.

The man lifted his head.

– Who are you people?

– You're switching the topic too fast!

Harrigan was a little taken aback.
– No, even if I try hard to remember, I won't remember anything, so it can't be helped right?

– Hmm, You've got a positive way of thinking. No, rather, ain't you turning on me?

– Once I manage to recollect something, I'll explain you. First, tell me something about you.

– Allright.

As soon as she corrected her seating posture on the stool, Harrigan pointed at herself.

– I'm Harrigan Halliway Haindora, the head of the witches that reside here.

The man wrinkled up his eyebrows.

– Witch…Witches? What are witches?

– So I've to explain from that part? But…

Harrigan looked up at the air while she pondered.

– Fu…mu, explaining to a person that doesn't have a single clue is surprisingly difficult, isn't it?

Finally, returning her head position, Harrigan.

– If I were to describe witches with a single word, then it would be women that can use magic.

– Is that so? I don't quite get it, but I get it.

– Which one is that?!

– I don't understand that thing called magic. Still, even if I am told incomprehensible words one by one, however much time passess, I won't be able to progress, I see it that way. Leaving the minor parts for later and understanding them little by little should be fine. For the time being, I want to roughly grasp the things.

– Hou?

What surprised Harrigan was that the man could unexpectedly maintain his calm attitude despite being thrown into a different world while losing his memories. On top of that, his way of dealing with current situations was surprisingly calm as well.

(Normally, if one were to learn about their own lost memories, they would feel shaken and confused, but…Well, could it be that his nerves are 2 or 3 times over the normal? Or could it be that his pattern of thinking is broken?)

– Well, What I want to know, or rather the thing I should know, is where is this place? And what year it is?

– If I were to be told that, I could only say it's the inside of 'the black forest'. As for the year… If we were to use the calendar from the neighbouring country, it would the year 12 of Kasandora the third. Then, using our chronicle it would be 415 years after the death of the great witch, Echidna.

– As expected, I don't get it at all.

While thinking hard about it, the man talked quietly to himself.

– I've the feeling like I've heard about the country of westerners. I wonder if perhaps I wasn't fired to such a country.

Hearing the man's words, Harrigan

– Westerners…. what's that?

Once she asked, the man moved his sight toward Ais and Lela and replied.

– Just like the two of you, I'm speaking about people having red hair and blue eyes.

– My hair ain't not red?

– Ah, that's right. Your's would be of a similar color to ours.

– Ours? So the inhabitants of your world, does everyone has the same black hair? You can remember that?

– No, that's not it. That's instinctive, rather than having or not the memories or the knowledge. I think it would be close to that. At least, in my world, the two of them… no.

The man shifted his eyes to the bagwormed appearance of Yuuki, who was on inside the sleeping mat, on the floor.

– At least there was no person who had hair color and eyes color like this one.

– Well then, please speak whatever you know based on your instinct. It should be fine like that.

– Even if you tell me that.

The man folded his arms while cocking his head many times.

– Once I try to explain something, it won't convert into words. Saying that, what I said before won't occur to me precisely.

– It's somehow bothersome, isn't it?

Saying so, Harrigan made a sour face.

– I don't feel particularly troubled by that. Indeed, I have forgotten about who I am, and then, I was fired into an unknown place, but, like that, I was rescued by you. Also, it seems that we can understand each other, so there's no need to panic nor rush the things.

– You… certainly have the guts, don't you?

– Really? I'm just trying to accept the things in front of my eyes.

– That's not something to be done casually, it's hard to accept the reality in front of one's eyes.

Despite the man thinking that there seemed to be something more in what she said, he decided not to point that out.

(I probably shouldn't dig too much into another person's circumstances. Rather than that.)

– Were I to say what the big problem is right now

Saying that, Harrigan bent forward her body.

– Hou? what it is? try to say it.

– I feel hungry.

Not just Harrigan, but Ais and Lela as well, were taken aback by the man's words. Finally, despite Harrigan raising her voice, she was smiling pleasantly.

– No no, that's a big deal. To think you would say that you're hungry under such circumstances, are you truly someone important? or just a big fool?

– When you're hungry, you can't fight, or so they say… Hmm?

– What's the matter?

– No…war… war? I've the feeling like I do nothing but that.

– Hou? a war? If it's a war, then we do too. Despite saying so, recently, we haven't won anything. We, witches, used to fight on equal terms with human armies, but now…

Saying that, Harrigan laughed while self-mocking.

Hm? the man raised his face.

– Humans? So the enemy you've fighted with are humans?

– That's right. We witches and the humans aren't compatible with each other. It could be said that we are… sworn enemies?

– I don't quite get it. For me you look like humans but ain't you as well 'humans'?

– We do. It's just that we are humans, who can use magic. We didn't say that we aren't people, but, humans would still distinct us. They would rigorously distinct and discriminate us, because, humans can't use magic. Therefore, they would refer to those who can as 'evil witches'. Witches are the established enemies of humans, that's why they must exterminate us.

– You're evil beings?

Hearing the simplistic question directed by the man, a self-mocking smile reappeared on Harrigan's face.

– Judging from the point of view of those, who can't use magic, it probably seems so.

– Being filled with envy and jealousy over those, who unlike them, possess special abilities, in the end, you would say they will wish for those possessors to vanish? Indeed, they're small-minded guys.

Harrigan directed her sight filled with sarcasm at the man.

– You too, won't you probably fear and disdain us after seeing our power?

– Huh? Why should I?

– No, even if you say so…You are not scared of those with unusual abilities? Isn't it eerie?

– Whether you hold abilities or not, it depends on each person. If I were to be scared of possessors of abilities that I don't have, I probably wouldn't be able to live in this world. I still don't know anything about your 'magic', but, you were the ones that rescued me. Were you to be hostile against humans, you'd probably just throw me out.

– That's right, rather than getting rid of you.

Harrigan run her sight over Yuuki, who was rolling on the floor.

– If it were Yuuki, she will probably scream things like ‘ kill’.

Saying that, the man’s face became unpleasant as he looked at Harrigan.

– Why is it that only this girl is hostile toward me and ready to fight?

– Even if I told you.

While answering, Harrigan made a depressed face.

– Yuuki’s disdain for men is bottomless.

– Despite there probably being other men, is that fine with you?

– No, there are no men in our place.

– What? What’s the meaning of that?

– It means exactly what I said. We are a group consisting of only women. In the first place, only women can become witches. That’s why Yuuki’s great disdain for men wouldn’t burst until now. Consider it as its spasm due to your sudden appearance.

-I… Is that so? I don’t get it, but I understand.

(Is that an unserius attitude, or rather a composed one? Somehow I can’t tell about this guy. More importantly…)

– Ais, Sorry for troubling you, but can you bring him a meal? I don’t mind if they’re leftovers.

– Yes, ane-sama.

– Shall I he-lp?

– That’s fine. You stay here, Leyla. If the magic of the amulet runs out, you will probably have to replace it with another.

– That’s righ-t.

– Well then, I am going.

Seeing off Ais, Harrigan faced again the man.

– With that, please wait for the meal.

Haha – because the man started to laugh loudly, Harrigan's expression became suspicious.

– What? What's the matter?

– This should be the continuation of what I said previously, but for you to let someone like me, whose origin is unknown, to eat, there's no way for you to be evil.

– I'm glad for your words, but, not everyone is as understanding as you. There's no way for them to understand what's right or wrong. Rather, it's because of the scarce number of people like you, that we have been fighting for a long time with humans.

– Well, I don't understand, but, I've the feeling like there was no end to those worthless wars in the country, where I lived…

The man looked up at the air with a distant eye as if reeling the memories which he had lost.

5

– Sorry for making you wait.

Soon after, Ais returned while holding a tray in both hands.

Once she put the wooden tray on the table, she grabbed an apple, which ripened early in the spring. This sort of fruits and wild plants were abundant in this black forest.

– I'll now squeeze the fruit juice.

As soon she grabbed the apple in her right arm, she lifted it over the wooden-made wine cup covered with filter cloth. Ei – saying so, she inserted power into her right hand.

The flatly crushed apple dripped with juice. Seeing that, the man was a little taken aback.

– You've got an incredible strength.

– If it's a person's head, I can easily smash it singlehandedly. So please don't cause anything weird, ok?

(This girl, is scary.)

While the man shuddered up, Harrigan smiled as as she spoke.

– For Ais, this much of arm power and gripping force would be just fragments of her ability. Once she uses her magic, she can further enhance her strength. Crushing stones, lifting big rocks, breaking a bear's spine, and even catching and flinging away a one-horn rhinoceros.

– A bear's spine!? That's amazing. And what's a rhinoceros?

– They're huge beasts with a big horn that lives in the plains. They are taller than me and 10-15 times heavier than an adult person.

– And you can fling away that guy?

– Ooh, that's right. Once she wrap its horn, she throws it like this- Eiyaah!

Lifting up from her stool, Harrigan demonstrated how it looks.

– Ane-sama, you're exaggerating things.

Ais's cheeks became sullen.

Kuku – leaking a smile, Harrigan sat again.

– Well, Ain't you scared?

– Indeed it's scary, but, such a thing probably be the same as a guy holding a weapon. There's no particular reason for me to disdain you, I think.

(Hmm, that's an interesting way of thinking from that man. Is he either thinking logically or rationally? At least, it doesn't come from his sentiment.)

Seeing only people, who would feel emotional hatred toward witches, Harrigan took a deep interest for the man's response and way of thinking.

The young Ais and Lela, who had never face anyone directly like Harrigan, weren't hooked by the man's way of judging things and thinking as much as Harrigan, nevertheless, despite them believing the man's talk about him losing his memories and not knowing anyone, they were surprised and in admiration for the man having a calm attitude, even though he was had to face such an unusual situation.

– Because we have finished our breakfast, unfortunately, there's not much left, but…

After Harrigan said so, Aisu present the tray, which had baguette, soup and vegetables.

Soon after he received it, the man put the it on his thigh. Ais added the wine cup containing the juice squeezed by her on the tray.

– Oh, sorry for the trouble. Well then, Bon appetit.

The moment he reached out his hand toward the food, he stopped moving and plucked the amulet on his forehead.

– This thing is in my way.

Hanging down from till his nose tip, indeed, it was bothersome while eating.

– Is it fine for me to take it out?

– That's right. Maybe behind the head… no, it should be better to attach it on the back of the neck?

As Harrigan looked at Lela.

– I don't think it will cause any problem in its func-tion.

– Please repaste it.

Nodding a little, Lela detached the amulet on the man's forehead. So as to peek behind the guy's back, she bent her body and reattached the amulet behind his neck.

– How is it? Can you still understand my words?

At Harrigan's question, the man lifted his right arm while saying that there was no problem.

– Well, then, shall I eat? My stomach already feels hungry.

The man extended his hands to the bowls on the tray and put the vegetables and the bread in his mouth one after another.

– This thing….Heh? I see…it has quite a different taste…but, it's delicious.

– You eat or talk? Decide on which one.

Not just Harrigan, but also Ais and Lela were watching astonished as the man was vigorously eating the food.

(This guy, he just bite completely into what was given to him without restraint nor leniency. Does he not know how to doubt strangers? Or could it be he's trusting us? Is he an idiot or a clever man? Is he someone important or perhaps a lunatic? I can't read him at all. Despite that, it's highly probable he's not a person from this world. It seems there's no sense in searching for clues, so should we look after him for a while? At worst, he could be a form of killing time. If he tries to harm us, we can just kill him, but, once it comes to that…)

Harrigan took a glimpse at Yuuki, who was tied up roundly in the ropes and rolling on the floor. She breathed out a sigh.

(The big question would be how to suppress Yuuki.)

6

Soon after Harrigan was pondering on any idea, Yuuki woke up.

While being half-awake, she dimly looked over the inside of the room only to eye a man, who was energetically eating, which made her woke up at once. Yuuki tried to jump up, nevertheless, being tied up with the ropes, she couldn't rise. On top of that, because she had a gag inserted, she couldn't talk. Rather than trying to understand how she ended like this, Yuuki continued to move while trying to raise her body and kept shouting at the man.

– Mnn! Mnnnn! Mmmnnnnnn!

With a perplexed face, the man ceased to eat and looked at Harrigan, Lela and Ais.

– I don't understand at all what she's saying?

At the man's question, Lela responded calmly.

– Kill you, I'll absolutely kill you,… is what she's say-ing.

– You can understand!?

– That's because we have hung out since we were li-ttle.

– Oh, that's why.

The man felt awkward to ignore Yuuki with the killing intention while continuing to eat.

Thinking about what he should do, He looked at Harrigan.

Harrigan shifted her sight from Yuuki, who continued her attempt to scream out while bending her body like a shrimp, and breathed out a sigh as she faced toward Aisu, telling her – do it! with her eye sign.

Ais, who moved forward, kneeled in front of Yuuki.

Putting a smile on her face, she grabbed Yuuki's both shoulders and raised her while standing up by herself. Because Ais's was taller than Yuuki, she lifted Yuuki to the level of her eyes. Yuuki's toes were floating in the air.

Her body was shaking and her appearance, which was tied up in a roll, gave the impression of a bagworm swaying in the air.

Aisu grabbed firmly Yuuki's shoulders over the ropes digging into them.

– Hmm hmm hmm!

Yuuki's face bent in pain.

With a casual face, Lela interpreted.

– Ow ow ow…is what she say-s.

Raising her arms further, Ais looked up to Yuuki's face and, while keeping her smiling face, said.

– I wonder if you can stop making fuss, Yuuki. Ane-sama is also troubled. You understand that?

– Hmm, mnnn, hmm, mnn, hmmmm!」

-I Got it, ow,I got it, ow, my shoulders are breaking… she say-s.

(What's with that pleasant way of doing things?)

Taken aback, the man looked at Yuuki and Ais.
– I'm glad, you understood.

When Ais loosens her hands power, Yuuki's neck loses its strength and fell to the front.

Aisu wouldn't cease her smile.

(That girl Ais, despite her gentle look, her inner self is the most fearsome.)

The man couldn't hide his surprise at the divergence in both Ais's look and inside.

– Well then, you will remain obedient until that person finishes its eating, ok? But, I'm not saying it's fine for you to make a fuss after that. You got that?

kaku kaku kaku – Yuuki shook her head without strength.

– Ah, aaah、I was suffocating!

Yuuki repeated taking deep breaths.

Ais, who turned back…

– With that, please continue your meal.

She urged the man.

– No, even if I'm told please, is it really fine?

Having such suspicion, the man looked at Harrigan.

– I don't mind. Please eat quickly. After that, I would like to talk a bit.

– That's right. I want as well ask some questions, so should I finish this meal at once?

The man grabbed the dishes again.

– Despite that, why do you hold such grudge toward men? Did something happened to you long time ago?

As the man spoke nonchalantly, at that moment, Yuuki's hair moved abruptly.

While looking down, a small muttering came from Yuuki's mouth.

– Don't… bring…. front… me.

– Haa? I cannot hear you.

Being in a rolled position, Yuuki warped her upper body while lifting her face. With a terrifically angry expression, she glared at the man and shouted…

– Don't bring up that subject in front of me!!

Despite being inside of the room, the wind arose and hitted Naga's face and body.

Even till then she was speaking about 'killing', ' driving out' men, nevertheless, it was clear now that her seriousness was different from that time.

The man jumped back unintentionally and touched his left waist on a spurt.

Not feeling the sensation in his right hand, the man looked at his left waist and smacked his lips.

(There's nothing. Certainly I….)

– This is bad!

Harrigan shouted sharply at Ais.

– Stop her!

The ropes that binded Yuuki's body began to split up. At the same time, Ais jumped toward Yuuki.

– Things like men, things like men, kill, kill, kill, I'll kill them all?

Snap

Hearing a weird sound, once the man moved his sight toward them, Ais twisted the girl's neck from behind as she clinged to her.

Yuuki's eyes turned white with her power leaving her body.

– That was dangerous, wasn't it?

Ais kept Yuuki in the same neck twisting position while smiling toward the man.

– No… just now, didn't her neck snap? Will she be right? Her eyes seems to have turned white.

Looking down at Yuuki, whose body lost its strength, Ais spoke in an indifferent manner.

– Certainly, it will be fine. Yuuki is quite robust.

– I… is that so? In that case it should be fine, but, just now…

The man moved his face toward Harrigan with the intention of wanting to ask, nevertheless, she wouldn't break down that stern expression.

– Don't inquire the reason behind Yuuki's disdain for men. I too, don't feel like explaining that to you.

– Got that… I'll pay more attention from now on.

– Please do that. Rather than that, finish your food quickly.

– No, that's fine. My stomach is already full, and also I don't feel like eating more after making her angry with that harsh words of mine.

– Is that so?

– Yea, it's enough. Thanks for the meal, it was delicious.

Once the man returned to his original seat, he deeply bowed his head towards Harrigan.

– You rescued me, so I'll say my thanks. Had it not been for you and me being given this meal, I'd probably had a dog's death.

– It's not a big deal, so don't mind.

– No no, I consider this to be a big matter. Just a while ago, some words popped inside my head, which are ‘a debt of a night’s stay and a meal’ but, it it feels as though it applies in my situation. That’s why I’ll without doubt return this gratitude.

– You don’t have to take it that seriously.

Saying that, Harrigan too, didn’t seem to be in a bad mood.

The man bowed down to Ais and Lela.

– Thank you for rescuing me. You have my thanks.

– No, don’t mention it.

– Don’t worry about i-t.

Being thanked by the man, Lela and Ais didn’t seem to be that dissatisfied, nevertheless, Ais kept bending Yuuki’s neck while having a much queer expression.

– Well then, shall we talk a little?

Saying that to the man, Harrigan gave instructions to Lela and Ais.

– I’ll have a small talk with this guy. Lela, you wait here. Ais, take Yuuki to your room and wake her up. Still, watch over her so to not let her go violent.

– Yes, ane-sama.

– And both of you, don’t talk about this man to other girls, got that?

– Yes, ane-sama.

– Got th-at.

– Well then, come this way.

Being invited by Harrigan, the man left her room.

7

The room to which Harrigan led was a study room.

There was a bookshelf together with lined up books inside the bedroom as well, nevertheless, in this one, all the four walls were placed with high bookshelves, which were packed with books. The room gave out the impression of being buried inside books.

– You're quite a reader, aren't you? I Can't even tell what kind of documents this are.

– These are indispensable for magic research and development. Rather than that, sit.

The man,who stood next to a bookshelf while staring at the document, turned around.

Sitting on the wooden stool, Harrigan waited for the man to sit.

– Because you've lost your memory, I'll restrain from asking you personal questions. In exchange, I'm thinking of telling you more about us.

– That would helps a lot. I too, want to learn fast about this world and you.

– I'll explain that generally and briefly. There might be things, which you don't understand, but leave the questions for later. Anyway for not just listen.

– Yeah, got that. Well then I'll entrust you with that.

8

– First, I'll tell you more about the war between witches and humans. Just as I said, we are disdained and estranged by humans due to us possessing unusual powers. While continuing to fight against the humans, we fell into decline, and it's not just our household. Right now, the whole race of witches are on decline. Our race is on the verge of dying.

– However, the biggest reason behind that is our number. If I were to say why, it's because we lose our power once we give birth to children. It's not like we will lose instantly our power, but certainly it's a big damage to that. That's why, we can't casually bear children. Once a witch diminish in her magic power, the only job remaining for her is raising a child.

– The partner is a man, you see? they would be chosen at one's own discretion. For us, the father doesn't play a big role. Another problem is that the born child doesn't necessarily possess the quality of a witch. That's right, there's no telling whether or not a child will house magic power. That's why our number won't increase.

– A long time ago, it was bit better. A long time ago… that is when humans weren't that many and the countries established by humans were not that strong. Back then, we were more powerful than now and there were people who would acknowledge us, nevertheless, the time has changed.

– The people passed through the mountains, creating new and numerous cities. Even now they're doing so. The agriculture developed and so the number of harvest, which resulted in natural growth of population. Then, the people expanded here and there, increasing the conflict between both sides.

– We too can't forget about the church's expanding influence. In the first place, they're our true enemy. The reason why there's no compatibility between humans and witches is due to their influence. While considering us as heretics, they spread about us being the ones that should be destroyed. The more they implemented their roots in this world, the more influence they had, making us becoming the enemy of humans.

– Like that humans recognized us as their enemy and whenever there had a chance or a gap, they would seize our lands. Trying to exterminate us, they began to commenced assaults. We are more superior in terms of individual combat skills, nevertheless, they have more war power than us. Even if we can use magic, taking several hundreds of human soldiers… is a task next to impossible.

– Because of that, our lands were gradually encroached. Even now, we have been pushed quite an area, into the black forest.

– Ah, besides us, there are several other clans that lives in this forest. However, we don't associate much. It seems that the humans describe us all with the term 'the country of witches' but, our activity doesn't include deep integration with other clans. It seems that a long time ago, when the great witch was alive, the clans had stronger connections with each other. Despite that, we are all treated the same by humans.

– We would become the first to bear the brunt of Kasandora kingdom's forces, since they're the nearest human country to us. We somehow repelled it for the time being, but we don't know how long we can keep resisting. If we were to fall out, the whole black forest would probably be in the humans' hands. It would be much a different story if the other clans united, but…

Harrigan talked dimly without anger, excitement not any lament.

– Then here is our fort. Beginning with this one, the majority of those who fight are packed in several of these forts located in this forest, beginning with this one. Children and elderly live in a hidden village. I'll say it, but I can't bring you there, and I don't have that much trust on you yet.

– I understand this much.

The man raised his hand as to express his understand.

After finishing to explain in general, Harrigan breathed out a sigh and continued her while saying – well then.

– I explained broadly about us and our current situation, but did you understand?

– That's right. I don't quite get it, but I understand in general.

– That's why! which one do you mean!?

– That one. I could understand roughly the course of action, but, after all, to know the things in detail, the only thing I can do is to experience them… or such.

Fufu – Harrigan smiled pleasantly.

(What an interesting man. Well, leaving aside whether he's a clever man or a fool, it's fine for him not to be scared of us.)

Harrigan had her interest caught by the man in front of her. No, perhaps she was attracted by the man itself.

The man that descended out of sudden from the air.

Even for a famous witch as Harrigan, a magic that could send people to the distant places was not seen or unheard of. Not to mention, rather than being fired from a distant place, it seemed more like he crossed the spacetime from the other place.

Harrigan thought about wanting to investigate that phenomenon.

And not just that.

She also wanted to learn more about the man himself.

A man, who could accept the situation with such a composure, despite being thrown into different world.

A man who asserts as someone unperturbed by emotions, of a deep faith that feels obligated to pay a meal and a night stay debt, and someone that doesn't make differences between us witches and the humans.

The man, who held the name of Naga.

The word, which Harrigan knew, held the implication of 'dragon' or 'dragon king'.

She didn't know whether the word indicated his name in that way. However, the man that fell from the sky, whose name held the meaning of 'dragon' could imply something. Because of that, Harrigan didn't plan to release the man. Nevertheless, as the head of the clan, there's no way for her to prioritize her personal interest. Speaking honestly about themselves, she seeked for the man's response.

As expected, the man showed a response according to her thoughts. He wasn't scared of them nor denied them. On the other hand, he would normally make contact with them without any sympathising. It wasn't an attitude that existed in this world. Assuming that the man indeed came from different world, perhaps, talking to him could open the path for the future of her clan.

There was no particular reason, nor established principles for that. Rather, it was her intuition as the witches' chief.

Harrigan have decided.

She decided to take care this man as the part of her clan. If he becomes a burden, it should be fine to throw him away, and if he intends to do any harm, it should be no problem in killing him.

Such was Harrigan's conclusion.

9

Once she revealed the man's presence to the others and said that she intends to raise him, continuous objections and doubts were received from the witches. Without there being anyone, who would consent positively, if it was something decided by ane-sama, Lela and Ais would only show a passive approval without any opposing. Nevertheless, in the end, everyone came to acknowledge the man, on the condition of throwing him away, were he to cause any trouble.

Yuuki was the only one, who would continue to oppose till the end, everywhere, firmly, severely and stubbornly. In the end, despite many attempts of calming down and lecturing, Harrigan managed to forcibly overcome Yuuki's opposition.

– This is what I concluded and I don't intend to change it.

– If Harri-nee says so, that's fine. Whatever happens, I don't care.

Saying so, Yuuki became completely angry, nevertheless she didn't seem to resort to any forceful methods, such as killing the man or throwing him out from the village. Because of that, Harrigan judged it would be fine to leave it like that for the time being.

It will be a problem to take care of a man, however, how should they refer to the man? For the time being, it wasn't a good idea just to omit that.

(Because that guy said that he thinks his name is Naga something, there's no way for us to ignore that. Dragon king…should we go with that? I've the feeling like this name is too much for him. if it is was to be the real dragon king, it would probably get angry, still, if we consider it as a nickname, it probably won't.)

Thinking so, Harrigan decided to referred to the young man as Naga.

Heh? is that so – After announcing that, it would be natural for a person to be surprised. Nevertheless, the majority of witches laughed instead. Their laugh had an element of mocking.

– It doesn't suit him.

– That name is a fail.

– Wont he get killed by the real dragon king?

Such impressions the witches had.

– Were you guys told of such things?

Despite Harrigan spurring on, the man remained calm.

– In the first place, I don't know what the dragon king is.

Is he an important individual or a fool? – Harrigan, who couldn't measure that man with normal criteria, was taken aback.

(But well, if he's just a simpleton, he probably won't become of use, but if he's an extravagant fool, then perhaps he can yield something. Shall I watch over him for the time being?)

10

With that, Naga, who had been decided to be supported by Harrigan and the others, for now decided not to take any action. Rather than that, because he didn't understand most about Harrigan's clan, as well about this world, even if he wanted to do anything, he wouldn't be able.

Should I first allow myself to observe and study? – Naga started talking.

– That's fine. Then, shall we walk around this fort once we finish the lunch?

After that they took their lunch and went to take a walk around the inside of the fort. At that time Naga asked…

– Hey Harrigan. When I fell into the bath house, wasn't there something I was holding to?

– You mean that weird-shaped sword in your waist?

Naga asked vigorously.

– That's it! What happened to it!?

– We are keeping it.

– Can't I've you return it back to me? Somehow, my left waist feels lonely, I feel anxiety and insecure.

– We will keep it for a little while.

-……

– I'm telling you, that we will keep it, for a little while!

– Naga's face turned miserable.

– Do you think that I keeping it is dangerous?

– That would be natural?

– Uh… is that so? well, it probably would be.

– Rest assured. Once we learn more about you while living together, we will return it to you.

Naga breathed a small sigh and nodded.

– Then, that's fine.

– Well, should we go on a stroll and treat ourselves?

Being led by Ais and Harrigan, they walked around the inside of the fortification.

The fort mentioned as fort three, which could be said to be their main base, wasn't as big in comparison with the others. It was surrounded by wooden fence, nevertheless, it had no ditches. Inside the ground, there were complex constructions, such as a residential building, storage house, weaponry, and a high watch tower. All of them were simple constructions made using woods.

It was probably a rare sight and unheard for him. Naga would frequently stop and look inside the buildings and ask about their name and functions. After having spent the afternoon like that and taking the dinner, Naga retired to a room offered by Harrigan.

– Oh my, as expected, today was a tiring one. I'll allow myself to go sleep earlier. Is it fine for me to take this off?

Naga pointed the amulet behind his neck.

– Lela will prepare for you a new one tomorrow, so don't mind.

– In case I won't be able to wake up tomorrow, please do it for me. I'm thankful for your meals and bedding. Well then, if you allow.

Raising his hand he gave a sign to Harigan, who escorted him until the room. As he suddenly began to take off his clothes, Harrigan became puzzled.

– Hey, what are you doing out of sudden?!

– My clothes are still drying, so I was thinking about leaving them out to dry completely while sleeping.

– If so, do it once I leave the room!

– Ah? I don't particularly mind. Do you Harrigan?

Despite Being a little bit red faced, Harrigan answered without averting her eyes.

– N, no, I wonder whether I too, don't mind at all.

-Well then, isn't that fine?

With just his loincloth, Naga composedly began to stretch his half-dried clothings.

(His body is quite trained… Wh, no no, it isn't the time to be watching muscles.)

Once she left the room and closed the door, Naga's snoring was heard from the inside.
(He surely falls asleep fast. Does he have much of courage, or does he have no wariness? He's a man hard to measure.)

Shaking her head, Harrigan returned to her room.

11

The following day, after taking the breakfast together with Ais and Harrigan, Naga expressed his wish to walk around the fort once more.

Today as well, he was wearing his clothing, which Harrigan considered as queer, and had a special made amulet attached by Lela at the same place.

(Because there are no other clothings for him, it can't be helped. I've to deal with that matter somehow. Well, should I leave that for later? However…)

There was no way to let Naga wander alone, so guiding was utmost necessary. That part could be done only by someone like Harrigan, nevertheless, she too had lots of duty piled up as the head of the clan.

-I too, can only help you in my free time, nevertheless… this isn't what I mean.

Once she said it in that way with disagreeableness.

– That's fine. In that case, you don't have to guide. Because I'll just hang around properly in this surrounding of the fort.

– The surrounding of the fort? do you plan to walk around the forest?

– Yeah, I want to learn, even if it's just a bit, about how this world looks. But first, I want to see with my very eyes this region where you live.

– A forest is a forest. However much you look at it, there are just trees.

– Ah, that's fine. I wanna see it while inhaling some air.

(What a weird guy. In the first place, the way in which he appeared was weird, but…)

– Even if you say so.

– What? Is there something I shouldn't see in the forest?

– Not that's not. But, people who walks this forest without knowing about it, will get lost. It's because, in addition to the forest being deeply dark, we put a barrier. It would be different in case they were to focus much and set a benchmark, but…

– A barrier…

Naga pondered.

– Yea, think of it as one type of magic. It's a magic used to deceive people's eyes, who doesn't know about this place.

– Is that so? Then, I cannot wander alone?.

Making a disappointed face, once he looked at the forest outside the fort, Lela, who was waiting a bit far away from them, stepped up.

-Ane-sama, Shall I do the gui-ding?

– Is is right? Will you fine by yourself?

– Even if the effect of the amulet runs out, I'll be there, so there shouldn't be pro-blem. Right now, there are things, which you need to do, so.

– This isn't what I mean. Will you be fine being alone with that perverted guy? – is what I wanted to ask. I'll say it, but this guys is a pervert?

– Don't ask rude things! And don't say it!

– Ah….

– And you, don't just start pondering about that!

Bending her neck while having a stern face, Lela raised up her face and looked at Naga with a glance from his tip to toes.

– Well, it will be fine , I thin-k. When necessary, I'll burn him using the fla-me spell.

– Is that so?Then I'll leave it to you.

As soon as Harrigan said so, she whispered to Lela's ear as if embracing her.

– Be careful of that man.

– That's why, I can hear you! Such a lack of respect.

Kukuku – Harrigan chuckled as she once again put the emphasis on what she said.

– You better follow Lela guide obediently?

– I know, good grief. If you worry so much it would be bad for your health.

– Not being worried about a man that comes and grope people's chest out of sudden, what else should I worry about?

– Ah… that's right, I was confused that time at the sudden course of events. There's no longer need to worry.

– I'd like to hope so…

Shifting her sight away from him, Harrigan took a glance at Lela's appearance. Nevertheless, the girl remained emotionless she would and looked at Naga.

(Despite her having an indifferent attitude toward things, it's rare for Lela to be this positive. Could it be that she's taking an interest into that man….?

Is it good or bad? Up to this point, Harrigan couldn't understand. Still, she felt it could be a sort of a new fresh wind that began to blow through the monotonous witches in this mood stagnant village.

– Well then, I will entrust you with that Lela.

– Leave it to m-e.

Like that Naga was taken by Lela and they both moved from the fort toward the forest.

12

In this virgin forest, all the trees were high with numerous branches that were thickly overgrown with leaves.

Despite now being the noon, the forest was thickly dim. Nevertheless, the grass below one's feet wasn't that high, therefore, it didn't cause problem when moving.

Because Naga walked with a fast and big pace, it was natural for him to be in front of Lela.

– Being inside this forest, seems to give me a depressing feeling.

Inside the dim forest, Naga shifted his sight left and right while walking as he muttered. Hearing that, Lela objected with a snap.

– It's not because we want to live here that we are he-re. It can't be helped but to live while avoiding conflicts with peo-ple.

Naga suddenly stopped and turned around.

– Are you guys content with that?

Lela was caught off guard.

– I think I saw how the things are going in this fort yesterday and today, but somehow the atmosphere felt silent. You could say there was no mood nor ambition? and also you looked resigned?

Naga took a glance at Lela's face.

– Running inside the forest as if driven away by humans, and hiding you presence motionlessly here in order to avoid conflicts with them. Are you satisfied with that?

– There's no, way, for us to be satisfie-d.

Shouting without realizing that, Lela covered her mouth hurriedly.

Perhaps, Harrigan as well held the dissatisfaction while being the leader of the group. Naga noticed that and interjected.

– Forget about what just happened no-w…

– If you say so, I'm not going to ask.

Again facing forward, Naga continued to walk.

On the other hand, Lela felt as if her body became heavy, being unable to take another step.

Meanwhile, Naga kept walking.

Once she returned to herself, there was no sight of Naga.

(Cra-p. For me of all the people to slack o-ff.)

While panicking, Lela tried to catch after Naga.

No matter how fast he is, he shouldn't be able to walk far away while being the first timer in this forest. What's more, as long there's not much of distance between them, Lela can follow him up thanks to her own magic leaking from the amulet, so, she didn't worry much.

Just as she anticipated, she spotted Naga's back after walking a while.

It seemed as though he was hiding in the shadow, kneeling and holding his breath while peeking at something in front of im.

Because his tension passed along to Lela, she approached unintentionally with her stealthy steps.

As she gently approached, Naga turned behind as he noticed her and gave her sign to stoop using his hand.

Once she lined next to him while keeping low her head, she asked as if whispering.

– Is there a beast or some-thing?

– A ferocious and brutal one.

Because Naga whispered back, Lela became tense.

Once she peek out with her face from the shadow of a thick tree trunk.

In front, there was a small valley-shaped river flowing, inside of which Yuuki was taking a bath. She was naked, which was natural one way or another.

-A…ah..indeed it's a ferocious bea-st. A specific one among peo-ple, but..

There was no doubt that she ditched the designated job and went to bath due to her facing previously with Naga at the fort.

(In that case, it's you reap what you sow, but..)

Lela thought about what they should do.

Yuuki, who didn't suspect anyone to peek her, climbed up the rocky area as she performed bold calisthenics, and jumped into the deep water from the rock while having fun.

Yuuki's wet and naked body was radiating with the sunlight. Naturally, because she didn't suspect anyone to peak, she wouldn't think about hiding her body.

Her body had white skin, which was almost transparent.

Her shoulders and waist drew smooth curves.

Her chest hills, which were neither small nor big, bulged with a pretty shape.

On top of them, cute and pink nipples protruded.

The lightly golden bush between her groins was damp with water and stickily clinging to her abdomen.

And then, a smiling face, which Naga hadn't seen until now, popped on her face.

– What's that? So she could smile like this?

Naga's sight was completely glued to Yuuki's face and naked body.

Leyla peeked with her sidelong glance at Naga's appearance.

(He's zealously looking, isn't h-e? Well, I can unders-tand that, but… her body isn't the same as Ais' still, Yuuki has quite an attractive bo-dy.)

Or at least it was more womanly than mine – is what Lela admitted.

(Nevertheless, he's probably too enthusias-tic. At this rate, there's a fear Yuuki will noti-ce. That girl is very sensitive to men's sight-s.)

-Naga-sa-n.

As soon as Lela placed her hand on his shoulders, Naga looked aside with his startled face.

-A… ah, sorry, I couldn't help it..

Naga made an excuse, nevertheless, he didn't seem to think that way.

– We have just come, so I haven't seen much.

(He doesn't seem so but, rather than th-at.)

– Don't mo-ve! It can't be helped that you have se-en. We can't be spotted now that we have seen her important pa-r-ts.

– What do you mean?

– If you're spotted on peeking, you will di-e. Saying that, you will be killed by Yuu-ki. That's is 9/10, 9 out 10, and 99 percent certain.

– Doesn't the last one give me less than 10% of chance to avoid?

– Yes, that's why it's certa-in. Even if ane-sama tries to stop her, Yuuki won't probably listen to he-r.

Naga's body shivered.

– You… could it be, you plan to report me to Yuuki?

Without answering to Naga's question, once Lela took out an amulet from her waist, she began to write down using her small brush.

– Yes, please attach th-is.

– W-what? What do you intend to do?

At that time, Yuuki, who was about to jump off the rock area, stopped. Frowning her eyes suspiciously, she look on the sides attentively.

– We will be noticed, fast attach… rather than that I'll attach i-t!

Lela banged the new charm with a slap on Naga's forehead.

– It's an amulet that cuts off one's presence. Remain sile-nt.
Just as Lela told, Naga ceased his movements and hid his breath while continuing to peek at Yuuki.

Yuuki, who was searching around for a moment with deep suspicion, suddenly yelled – Ah! Naga's body froze thinking that he was spotted, however, it wasn't that case.

– A smoke signal from the fort!

Yuuki jumped toward her thrown clothings and wore before one could even notice. Once she did that, she run up the slope and disappeared in a blink of time inside the forest.

Waiting until she disappeared, Lela stood up.

– You narrowly escaped from death, Na-ga-san.

– A… ah, it seems to be so.

Once Naga breathed out a sigh of relief and loosened his body, Lela bent her waist while reaching out her right hand to scrape off the amulet on his forehead.

– Speaking of which, Yuuki said there was a smoke signal rising. Shouldn't we head back as well?

Lela looked up at the sky toward the fort.

Indeed there was a string of red smoke seen from between the trees.

– There's no doubt that something happe-ned at the fort. Let's head bac-k.

Naga slowly stood up.

– Despite that, why didn't you report me to that guy?

– If I report, you will di-e? Even if I report you to Yuuki at the fort, instead of this place, you will be kill-ed.

– Are you actually considering me carefully?

Lela raised the edges of her mouth with a grin.

– Let's make a deal Naga-san.

– Ah, so it was like that.

Then Naga grinned when he understood the situation.

-Well? what's the condition?

– Whenever you manage to retrieve some of your lost memory, please talk about it to me first, no matter what it i-s.

– Are you fine with that?

– You might think that it's trivial, but for me it's importa-nt. I definitely want to learn more about the other world, which doesn't exist he-re.

Naga and Lela looked at each other. Their sights intertwined with each other in the air.

Naga couldn't guess what kind of request she had, nevertheless, he nodded as he said – Yeah, fine.

– If it's enough for you not to leak it, then it's a cheap price. I'll talk however much you want.

Lela lowered her sight and bowed down.

– Thank yo-u.

– No, that's fine. By the way, can I ask you one thing?

Naga spoke to Lela's back as she was about to run.

-Wh-at?

– Why does Yuuki disdain men so much?

– Shouldn't ane-sama already told you about not inqui-ring?

– No, I was just bothered by it. She hasn't shown that violent reaction until now?

– That's righ-t. Yuuki is specia-l.

– Why is that?

– It's not something I should answe-r. If ane-sama deems it as fine, she will probably talk to you about i-t.

– Such way of talk putting on airs.

– It seems that she made some unpleasant memories when she was small. Probably she can't forget about the painful experien-ces.

Naga felt a throb in his chest.

He couldn't explain the reason behind that, nevertheless, there's no doubt, some fragments of his memories reacted at Lela's words.

(I see. so she had some painful experiences at her childhood? It seems that I had gone through the same. When it comes to this, losing one's memories doesn't seem to be half bad, doesn't it?)

A masochistic smile floated on Naga's face.

Seeing that painful smile on his face, Lela pulled back her head, nevertheless, Naga's smile immediately vanished and his face turned back to a daring one.

– Ah, sorry for stopping you. We should hasten.

– Then… let's ru-n. Please tag along without falling behin-d.

Because Leyla break into a run inside the forest, Naga run after her.

(A smoke signal? Did something happened? Could it it that the fort was attacked?)

Naga's anticipation were half right and half wrong.

Chapter 2 – The Battle of Witches And Humans

Running into the village, Naga and Lela saw several witches gathering in an open space, inside the fortification and making the smoke signal. Harrigan was standing in the center with Ais, who was making the smoke. Despite Yuuki running before them, she was nowhere to be seen.

“Ane-sama , what’s the matt-er?”
“Lela? You guys are surely late.”
“That’s because we were deep inside the fores-t.”

Lela told the lie calmly.

Her urge of wanting to learn more about other worlds, was it perhaps a matter of highest priority, which she couldn’t tell Harrigan?
Naga was in admiration for her huge knowledge greed, nevertheless, at the same time he was dumbfounded about Lela putting her desire before her friends, even if it was a little. Still, presently, Lela was the only one to know about him peeping. Whether she would expose him or not, it was only dependant on her. Naga could only feign not to know.

“A pigeon messenger was sent from the first fort. It seems that an army of human is closing in.”

Lela had a bit of a surprised face, nevertheless, her expression didn’t change.
Did you ask….. from where the army comes fro-m?

“Hmm, they are troops of the Kasandora Kingdom. According to the message their number isn’t more than 200.”
“That’s a large number for a reconnaissan-ce.”
“True, the problem lies there.”

Making a serious face, Harrigan continued speaking.

“Till now, they have check the terrain directly under the fort, face toward it by climbing the slope, and receive our attack only to run away. – This was the routine that they keep repeating. If they really have decided to deploy as many as 200 soldiers, it probably means that Kasandora kingdom is finally serious about capturing this fort. We too have to prepare.”

Rather than asking the nearby witches for an explanation, Naga should probably talk to them about it, which will let him grasp the situation by himself.

“Right now, the ones at the fort are Selena and De-e?”

As Lela looked around at her friends's faces, Harrigan shook her head as in saying "good grief"

"Just a while ago Yuuki returned, but once I told her that Naga went to the forest, she said that she didn't want to see him when he came back and escaped."'

Using her elbow, Lela occasionally thrusted Naga's side.

"That was quite lucky, wasn't i-t?"
"It…seems so."

Seeing both Naga and Lela exchanging a conversation between each other, Harrigan became concerned, nevertheless, she made up her mind thinking that it wasn't the right time for that.

"My other daughters have probably seen the smoke signal and are coming back, but it's not possible for me to call back the ones that are stuffed inside the others forts. I can't exclude the possibility that human soldiers might reach the other places."

Also, Harrigan added only to herself.

(I have to pay attention to the movements of the others witch clans as well.)

"For the time being, we can only depart with the people we have now. Please hasten yourself and prepare."

Once Harrigan ordered, the four people that were in front of her run away from the open space like rabbits.
Even Ais, who launched the smoke signal said.

"I too, should prepare for the battle."

Saying that, she left the space.

"I too will prepa-re."

After Lela ran, only Naga and Harrigan were left.

Looking over the place where everyone had left, she sighed.

(Recently, the humans forces have become quite active. Can we push them back like we have done till now….? No, it's not the right time for pondering over that. I too, have to make preparations.)

Seeing that Harrigan was about to leave to the residential building, Naga called her to halt.

“Hey, Harrigan.”

(Ah, that’s right. I completely forgot about this guy.)

Once she turned around, her sight met with Naga’s.

(Well then, what should I do? I can’t certainly bring him to the battle, so..)

Toward Harrigan, who had a thoughtful face, Naga said something unexpected.

“It seems that there’s going to be a battle. At any rate, won’t you take me with you?”

“No, but…”

“I told you already, but I want to return the favor of a night’s lodging and a meal. If you, who rescued me, are going to fight, then of course I’m going to help you.”

Despite saying so, there was no tension appearing on his face. At that point, Harrigan decided to give him a warning.

“It will be dangerous?”

“I’m used to fighting. I can’t recall much of detail, but there is no doubt I’ve experience of wars thanks to countless battles. That’s why, you don’t need to worry.”

“…….Is that so. Indeed, leaving you alone here will be much more insecure.”
“I’m thankful for having you worried about me, but…”

Harrigan shook her head as if she were saying “that’s not it.”

“Rather than worrying about you, I’m more worried whether you won’t assault the children that are left here.”
“About that?! that’s what worries you?!”

Harrigan reciprocated with a stern expression at Naga, who shouted.

“Suddenly falling from the sky, then groping and rubbing a person’s breasts. Don’t you think it is natural for me to be worried about my daughters by leaving you alone?”
“Ugh”

Naga moaned and became stiff.

“N, no, that’s you see, how should I put it, after being thrown into an unknown world, wouldn’t you be confused, bewildered, or agitated? Don’t you think? Anyone would act unpredictably after ending in such a situation.”
“So while being confused you jumped straight onto my breasts and groped them?”

"……"

Harrigan looked at Naga, who had a cold sweat while becoming stiff, with her cold eyes.

"Sorry!"

He suddenly bowed down.

"How should I say, because your breasts were charming, I suddenly wanted to grope them."

"Pfft"

Harrigan spouted a light laugh unintentionally.

"That's because they had a nice shape, a nice tone, and were big. They were a kind of charming breasts that you wouldn't think that exist in this world. Having such splendid things in front of one's eyes, if it's any man, anyone would want to touch them, grope them, rub them. I mean, there's no man that wouldn't do it. That's why…."
"Ah… I get it. It's fine so be silent. Hearing you makes me feel embarrassed and unable to stand still."

Despite her interrupting Naga, Harrigan, who was red faced, didn't seem to be that much displeased.

"Setting that aside."

After coughing once, Harrigan returned back to the topic.

"If you say you want to come, that's probably fine."

(Well, I don't think you will become much of help, but…rather than saying so)

Harrigan narrowed her eyes and stared at Naga.

"Don't become a burden."

Naga threw out his chest and replied.

"You don't have to tell me that."
"Then, come with me."

2

In front of Harrigan's residence, Naga waited for her battle preparations to be done.
Of course, he was wearing the clothes that he had since he came here, however, despite wearing his own clothes, Naga couldn't wipe the strange feeling of something missing..

(As expected, with my left waist being empty, it doesn't feel right. I wonder if I can have my weapon back.)
While moving in front of the building without any calmness, the door opened and Harrigan went out.

"Sorry for making you wait."
"No, I wasn't waiting that… long!?"

Seeing Harrigan's appearance, Naga couldn't hide his surprisement.

She wasn't wearing any armor or helmet. What she wore was a long ancient clothing, similar as the one before. In additiont, she was carrying on her back some kind of cloth toolbag but, besides it, Naga was unable to find out any changes.

Rather than that, if one was to take a closer look, it seemed that the long skirt she wore became thinner in comparison with before. Furthermore, the notches in her skirt's hemp were much higher and reached her waist area. Her seductive bare legs, which peeked from the gaps between the notches, were no different, however, its area increased. The area around her neck was covered, but since the material that did so was thin, her bulged chest became much more emphasized, which gave out a nice feeling. It wasn't the outfit of someone that is now about to go to battle at all, or at least it wasn't possible for Naga's common sense. With this, won't she sustain a lethal injury if she becomes hit by a single stray arrow?

Not with surprisement, but rather with a dumbfounded face he run his sight through Harrigan's body. Once he did so, she noticed his sight and directed at him a stern expression.

"Hm? You, even though we are about to set for a battle, you are still obstinately appreciating my chests? Ain't you quite composed?"

"That's wrong!"

Naga shook his head as if he's saying, that's not it.

"You too, despite we are going to a battle, how can you wear that outfit?"

Being told so, Harrigan looked down her body.

"Hm? Is there anything weird?"
"It does. Why won't you wear an armor or anything like that? At this rate, you won't be able to fight with swords. Far from that, won't you die being shot with a bow?"
"…Ah, so it's that?"

Harrigan finally understood what Naga wanted to say.

“I still haven’t talked to you about the magic in more detail.”
“Magic? Is is somewhat related with that thin outfit?”
“It does. Magic is in other words, our way of fighting.”

Making a dubious face, Naga cocked his head in puzzlement.

“In other words, we neither fight with swords with humans in the frontline nor we shot using bows. That’s because metal diminishes our magic power. It becomes a hindrance when using magic. That’s why we don’t wear metal-made armors and so does in case of metal-attributed weapons. As for clothing, we will only wear the thinnest one that doesn’t obstruct our magic power as much as possible.”

Naga still cocked his head with a curious face.

“In case we needed to make the most of our magic, being nude would be the best method, however, there’s no way for us to do so? Because, already wearing this thin outfit…..hey, you.”

Having a lewd look on his face, Naga hurriedly returned back to himself.

“ W, what? “
“Just now, weren’t you thinking about indecent things?“

shaking shaking

Naga shook his head left and right with all of his power, nevertheless, Harrigan would direct at him a sight full of suspicion.

Trying to somehow return to the topic, Naga threw a question.

“Then, how do you intend to fight?“
“Well, you’ll understand it if you see it.“
“Is that so? Well then, I’ll allow myself to observe and learn slowly. Well leaving that aside, you aren’t going to say that you plan to attack with only the people that was on the open space, right?”
“I didn’t say so.”
“I think you’re right.”

Naga breathed a sigh of relief.

“Some of my daughters should come running from the forest.“

– Some!? Then, even if we joined together, wouldn’t we be less than 10 people!?

“I too, am thinking about wanting to have just a bit more of people.“

Naga had a mixed expression between amazed and miserable.

“Hey, a war is about number rather than quality. There are about 200 enemies right? And you intend to fight them with having just 10 people?“
“It can’t be helped. That’s because we only have this much of fighting power.“
“Till now it has been like that?“
“That’s right.“
“You have been quite able to repel the enemy’s offense. “
“That’s because you don’t know about our strength nor our method of fighting. ”
“You seem to be quite self-confident. “

Harrigan slightly smiled. Was it a smile of being proud, or was it a self-mockery? Naga couldn’t judge that.

“Despite that, presently we are holding back the humans’ invasion with all our strength. Because their number seems to have increased a little this time, according to our reconnaissance, there’s a chance that it might become a real combat. I feel a bit anxious about that. but well, if it’s just pushing them back, we can somehow manage. “

Naga held an expression that said that he still didn’t understand.

“Once you see it with your own eyes, you will know.“
“Ah, got that. I’ll watch carefully your gallant figure.”
“Well then, it’s fine for you to tag me along.“

Naga called out to Harrigan, who said that with an appearance full of confidence while turning her back.

“Speaking of which, Harrigan. The weapon which you took away from me, won’t you return it back to me?“
“Hm, is that so? That’s right. It will be bad to ho have tag along to a battlefield without any weapon. All right, wait there. I’ll bring it back to you right away.“

Harrigan went into the house and brought back Naga’s weapon in her hand, which was hidden inside her study room.

Receiving the sword from her hand, Naga put it in gladly on his waist belt.

“Ohh, this is it, this. As expected, without this guy I won’t be at peace of heart,“
“Fufun, you’re saying it as if it is part of your body.“

“Saying part of my body is an exaggeration, but somehow it feels insecure being unarmed. This sword…no…a sword?“

Naga cocked his head.

“That’s wrong. this is not a sword.“ (Naga)
“Ha? If it doesn’t, then what it should be?“
“This is….this is…this is, that, that’s right, I remembered! This is a katana!“
“KATANA? Is that the name of your weapon?“
“Name—? Did this weapon have a name—-?….That’s right, it should be fine if you consider it as a type of sword with that name.“

Harrigan smiled.

“I don’t quite get it, but let’s say I understood. Rather than that, you were able to recall its name, weren’t you?“
“Yeah, I recalled.“
“Do you remember anything else apart from that?“

Naga’s radiant face quickly turned into a depressed one.

“No…it’s still no good.“
“Well, you don’t have to be so discouraged. Even if it as just a single memory, won’t you be able to remember other things later?“
“….you’re right, but will I be able to wait patiently?“

Since then, excluding Harrigan, 10 young witches with appearances of being in their teens had gathered at the village’s plaza. Their appearance were completely inconsistent and none of them had an armor.
Everyone wore thin clothes similar to Harrigan’s with lots of exposed area. There were even those wearing less than her.
Will they be really fine with that outfit – Naga was surprised which wasn’t unjustifiable for him as their clothing was basically different from what he would intuitively know. he wasn’t not just be surprised but also felt the sense of danger. Once he looked with anxiety over the gathered witches, his sight met Yuuki’s.

As expected, when it comes to a sortie with everyone, she too, had to set out without being able to refuse seeing Naga.

Yuuki too, wore similar clothes to the one the other witches had, which was thin and had lots of skin exposure. Her body lines were visible. Once Naga took a glance at her appearance, it couldn’t be helped for him to refresh the memory of seeing her completely naked during the bathing time.

(That was…indeed pretty.)

Nevertheless, the girl looked towards him, which didn’t hide her feeling of disgust and hatred, and slightly moved her lips. He couldn’t hear what she said, however, thanks to Lela’s charm attached on the back of his neck, he was able to grasp it somehow in the back of his brain.

“Die!“

Yuuki, who said it as if about to spit it out, looked at Naga as if at a filthy object with her scorning eyes and turned away.

(I’m being quite hated, am I?)

Naga smiled wryly inside his heart.

(Well, in the first place. I was a person that was disdained, I…speaking of which, no…was that so? I’ve the feeling it was like that…)

Somehow feeling that his unpleasant memories were about to emerge, Naga moved his sight from Yuuki and thinked in another thing.

No only the young witches were present at the plaza but also children from the hidden village appeared in the fortification.

“Hey Harrigan, you aren’t really planning on bringing those small children right?”

Seeing Naga paying attention to 3 girls of about 10 years old, Harrigan shook her head as in saying “Of course not“.

“Those children are still too young to go to a war. I’ll have them staying here.“
“Hearing that, I feel relieved.“

Harrigan faced towards the 3 children.

“Stay here and watch over this place obediently. We will be back after 2 to 3 days. You know how to prepare meals, right? Once the other daughters come back, tell them to leave at least two people in this fortification. In case something happens, send us a pigeon, but pay attention when dealing with them at the dovecote. If you deem this place to be dangerous, run away as fast as you can to the village, got that?“

Harrigan told them. Was it because they were used to such a situation? The children nodded at Harrigan’s words without showing fear, hesitation or noise.
Ain’t they brave, or so – Naga thought while greatly admiring them.
Naga had the feeling like the memories of his country at war slightly resurfaced on his mind.
He remembered that over there battle was a daily occurrence, that death was sitting side by side everyday, and that the women and children, those who were viewed as weak, lived each day in fear.

(Naturally, the women here seem to be combatants, however, I’ve the feeling like the aspect of war here is different with the one I know from my world. Even if it’s true, how do they intend to fight in that outfit?)

With the memories of his own war experience being faint, Naga couldn't recollect in detail about the fighting methods, nevertheless, it was hard for him to accept the scene before his eyes no matter what he would do. Such was his intuition, or rather, it couldn't be helped for him to feel that it was not right. Naga had the feeling that it wasn't different from his previous world, where he would feel aroused before the battle, despite him being accompanied by sense of discomfort and doubt, which took precedence over his other feelings.

Exaltation and resignation, obligation and expectation, fear and joy.

Such contrary feelings were shaking his soul.

On the other hand, he would feel himself calm.
He wasn't fighting for the sake of a war, but rather, he was fighting to win.
Despite Naga being shook by his zealous soul, he stared at the witches, who were making preparations for the battle in the plaza, with his calm eyes.

4

"Everyone, are you all prepared? Let's go!"
"Yes, Big sis." (everyone)

Together with Harrigan, Naga, Ais, Lela and Yuuki, went off to battle. Besides them, there were four other witches – Selena, Dee, Kay and Northa. In total there were 8 people.

(She said about 5, 6 people being in the forest, but, at this rate, won't it become 12,13 people? Even if there are several people at the fort, at the end there's only several people. How do they intend to fight the enemy of 200? What's more, with that outfit. Perhaps it's her usual way of doing things since Harrigan seemed to be much confident, nevertheless…no, wait a bit.)

Being trapped inside a big question, Naga unintentionally stopped his feet and called out to Harrigan's back, who tried to run out from the fort.

"Hey, Harrigan. Don't you guys have horses?"

Harrigan stopped and turned around as she answered curtly.

"We don't."

Not expecting this kind of answer from Harrigan, Naga felt dejected inside his heart and piled up his question.

"Why don't you have horses?"
"It's difficult to tame wild horses, and we don't have spare time for that."

“In that case, wouldn’t it be better to buy them?”
“Do you think humans, who are hostile against us, will sell us horses?”

Being asked back made Naga lost at words.

“Long time ago, there used to be wandering people who would help us by selling horses, nevertheless, now they rarely visit this place.First of all, riding a horse is hard, especially, in a forest like this. Considering the danger of falling off from the horse, it would be better to run using your own feet.”
“Is that so? It’s because it’s this kind of forest that I believe that traveling with a horse would be much faster.”
“Is it because you don’t want to run?”
”Uh, w-well, I won’t deny that aspect, but…”
“You are such a weakling.”
“No, in my world it was common to ride horses….probably.”
“Here it’s common to run using one’s own feet, so Give up.”
“Ah, is that so? Got that.”

No matter how deep is the forest, Naga thought it might take a moment or two to get out the forest while running along with the witches, nevertheless, he was greatly mistaken.

5

“At this rate, won’t it take us half a day till we get out the forest!?”

Since they went out of the fort at noon, it seemed as though they needed just a bit till they reach the end of the forest, nevertheless, the day was already turning to deep night.
Harrigan made a break several times, despite that, Naga still gasped for breath.
Compared to him, Harrigan was composed without showing any tiredness nor sweating.
The other witches were the same.

(For him to make this much noise over such trifle thing. Should I have perhaps made Ais carry him on her back from the beginning?)

While thinking so, Harrigan looked at him coldly.

“It’s thanks to this deep forest that humans cannot easily invade our territory.”
“It seems to be so…but you are really good walkers. Even my body should be quite trained, but…”

Bending forward and putting his hand on his laps, Naga was desperately catching his breath.

“Haahn! You’re just a weakling. Despite just saying that with that energic mouth of yours, in reality you are just a weak, gutless, frail and lazy big idiot.”

As if taking the opportunity, Yuuki abused Naga with as many jeers as she wanted to say. In spite of her getting carried away and him wanting to retort her, Naga didn't have the energy to retort back.
As expected, a horse was required. What's more, if a half day is needed to reach the fort, then they probably won't make it in time for a war. Because Naga thought so, he asked Harrigan.

"Hey, if it took this much time, wouldn't the fort fall before you could even reach?"
"No, it wouldn't happen. We have been especially careful whenever human soldiers would reach the fort. That's why till now we haven't had many problems. In the first place, even now, the human soldiers wouldn't try too hard in taking down this fortification. They would approach whenever they saw an opportunity, nevertheless, once we attacked them, they would retreat so as not to sustain big damages."
"Hmm, so it was like that?"
"Probably they were measuring our war potential. What's more there's a lot of craftsmanship implemented in the fort, which are based on magic, however, they didn't seem to be used. That would be the proof that the enemy has so far been focusing on scouting the surrounding of the fort. Naturally, this time unlike before, I'm a little bit worried about their increase, but.."

Even if being told about the magic craftsmanship, Naga probably couldn't understand.

Despite not having concrete memories, Naga knew about instances where the overwhelmed side that tried to protect a fort would repel the onslaught of the bigger army, as long they had enough time for preparations. It was something based on his experience. For example, by throwing lumber and stones on the enemy army, or pouring boiled water and oil. It would probably be similar to the magic craftsmanship.

"Well, I don't quite get it, but I got it."
"Again that? As always it suits you."
"Please don't say it that harshly."

Naga refuted while straightening his lower back and clapping his hands together.

"That's fine already. So there's some distance left?"
"Yeah, even with your pace, it should take less than a moment to leave the forest. The fort is ahead of that."
"….how much do you mean by saying 'ahead of that'?"
"Don't worry. It's just in front of your eyes."

Not being afraid of what others may think, Naga breathed a sigh of relief.

Seeing that, Harrigan smiled a bit.

(Indeed, he's an honest guy. that part of him is likeable, still, to be out of breath after making this far, he won't be able to live here. Guess, I've to train him a little bit more.)

The other witches, apart from Lela, had faces which didn't seem to admire. Rather than that, perhaps they deliberately ignored that fact. Nevertheless, there was one, who would treat him as a fool, unlike Harrigan – that was Yuuki whose smiled appeared on her face.

"Well then, let's go."

Holding a torch, Harrigan took the lead and started running again. The other witches followed her with Naga, who was desperately trying to catch up, being the last. Next to him, Ais was holding a torch while running, so as to match his Naga's pace.
While thinking that collapsing here would disgrace him forever, Naga forcefully cheered himself up and finished running the remaining distance. Just as Harrigan said, it didn't take a moment till the thickly dense trees would lower their height, finally, making the forest end abruptly.

6

There was a precipitous cliff in front of the forest that ended, its angle was almost close to being perpendicular.
A small fort was built in the slightly opened area, between the cliff and the forest. Apart that single place, there was a cliff stretching immediately in front of the forest.

The terrain gave the impression of a chunk of land being cut off with a big nata, nevertheless, the front of the fortification was not consisting of only cliff but also a slope. It gave the impression as if a giant pressed a small mountain against the cliff, making half of the mountain sink and bury into the cliff. It was a steep slope, but not like the precipice that extended left and right. If people were to think about climbing it, they would probably be able to.

The witches' fort was built in a place which made it possible for them to control the base of the slope.

Naga thought that the impression of the thickly dense forest would turn into one of the lowlands, however, contrary to that, it was a highland, which made him surprised.

Once he looked around the surrounding of the fort, the figures of two witches appeared on the other side. Because there was a small gap in the wooden fence, which surrounded the fort, one could peek inside. The two young witches that appeared took off the big bar from the gate and opened it. Compared to the size of this fort, it was a big gate that was improper for it.

With Harrigan at the lead, the other witches entered inside the fort. Naga too, followed them as he set foot on the fort.

Once he entered inside, the fort was much smaller that what he anticipated. It was 1, 2 sizes smaller than the fortification number 3. Inside the fort, there were only simplistic, wooden-made buildings, similar to a residence and storehouse. If one were to say what was

noticeable for the fort, it would be the inside of the wooden fence and the highly constructed watchtower, which looked down at the cliff.

And then, there were just 3 people packed inside this fort.

It was small number of people, which could be hardly called reinforcement, but, once they entered, Ais put the bar back on the gate.

Harrigan introduced the witches of the first fort to Naga.

The two of them were sisters – Linne and Linna, who had identical looks. As expected, they were lightly dressed just like the other witches, which didn't make them seem to be the ones who should be packed inside the fort, on the frontline. They weren't surprised at the arrival of Naga, Harrigan and the others, as they should have received the homing pigeon containing the beforehand report, nevertheless, they had the appearance of being immensely curious about first time seeing a man, not to mention coming from another world.

"What's the state of the human army?"

After being asked by Harrigan, one of the sisters replied. Despite being just introduced to, Naga couldn't tell who was Linne and who was Linna.

"It seems that a troop which was sent ahead is gathered at the bottom of the slope. Once dawn arrives, they will probably climb it. Right now, Cu is looking over from top."
"There's still some time till dawn. Shall we climb the watchtower as well? Lela and Linna, come with me."

Because Harrigan said so, Naga asked her.

"Is it fine for me to climb as well?"
"I don't mind. Follow me"

Harrigan faced toward him and nodded.

"Ais and others go take that out. After you do it, go rest in your rooms. And once it's dawn, we'll mobilize."

Leaving that message, Harrigan moved toward the ladder to climb the watchtower.

As soon as he noticed, there was no sign of Yuuki. Perhaps after entering the fort, she moved straight to the place where Naga wouldn't see her, like the residence building or inside the warehouse. Harrigan, who as well seemed to notice, didn't say anything in particular and placed her hands on the ladder. Following her, Rinne and Lela continued, with Naga being the last to climb, but..

Once he looked up, a scene which would be hardly described in words, unfolded in front of his eyes. Be it long or short, everyone was wearing skirts. And then if you add a perpendicular ladder, it was completely visible. the area from their buttocks to the waist cloth.

Seeing that superb view, Naga's eyes lit up.

(The girls here, besides from having quite open clothes, they're energetic to the extent of being scary. Well, if they're fine with that, I somehow can't say anything, but….)

Without restraints nor mercy, Naga shifted his sight up while climbing the perpendicularly furnished ladder.

Though Naga looked up directly, no one said anything. Was it because they weren't aware of his sight? or because their attention was focused on the human's assaulting troop? Whichever reason it was, for Naga it was an unexpected luck.

Once he stood on the platform of the watching tower, Harrigan was in front of him while standing in front of the constructed handrail and looking down below her eyes.

'Despite it being so dark that nothing can be seen, could it be that the witches are able to see in the dark?', or so Naga suspected.

The name of the witch standing next to Harrigan and pointing below was probably Cu. The girl, whose whole body was coiled with fine leather belts, had a quite stimulating appearance. The belts covered her vital parts, or perhaps, one could say there was nothing else to cover besides her vital parts. Despite that, her appearance was way too stimulating for Naga, who came from another world. As soon as he opened widely his eyes and directed them at Cu, she turned around, as if noticing his glance, making both of their sight meet each other.

Once he looked at her while panicking and trying to avert his eyes, Cu bowed down toward him with a serious expression on her face.

"O-Oh?"

Raising his hand collectedly, Naga too bowed back to her.

After that, Cu advanced toward Naga and presented him a thick piece of cloth.

– Hm? This is?
– Dawn, cold, please take it.
– Ah, is that so? Sorry for causing you troubles.

After he bowed down lightly and received the cloth, Naga put it on his shoulders.

– Speaking of which, isn't that outfit cold on you?

Hm? – Cu twisted her neck.

– It's fine. These will retain warmth.

She pointed out the leather belts, which she was wearing on her.

– You mean for real?
– Yes. If you touch them, you will understand.
– Heh? Let me see.

I see – As soon as he reached out his hand and touched the belts coiling around her body, he muttered while feeling a little bit of warmth.

– Whoa, they are indeed warm. Should I say these are strange, or fascinating?

Naga began to touch all around Cu's belts.

– Wow, here as well, and here too. Even here it's warm!
– Ah, that place is, a little troubling.
– Just what are you doing!?

Whack.

Being hit by Harrigan's thick bundle of hair, Naga's body blew away.

– Aww… it hurts. Speaking of which, what's with that hair of yours!?
– This is part of my magic. Rather than that, I'm asking what you are doing!

Naga, who was rolling on the floor, raised up and massaged his head while answering.

– No, that girl told me to check how warm her belts are, so I was just making sure of that?
– You, haven't you been checking Cu's body besides her belts?
– You're just imagining things.

(T-this guy is…)

Facing toward Cu, Harrigan reprimanded her gently.

– You too, don't let your guard down around this guy. That's because he grabs people's breasts out of nowhere, you see.

Cu tilted her head.

– In other words, Ane-sama, had her chest, grabbed, by that person?

The 3 other witches shifted their eyes toward Harrigan while listening attentively.

– Ah… Ahem.

Harrigan coughed unnaturally and told Cu.

– Just forget about our current talk.

Saying so, she glared at the other witches.

– You girls as well, don't slack off and stand on your guard.

Once the witches returned to their post in haste, Harrigan directed her stern sight at Naga.

– You too, should feel more tension in situations like this.
– Ah, my bad my bad. Your appearance was somewhat stimulating, so I became a little merry.

Seeing Naga, who was laughing foolishly, Harrigan looked at him with an astonished expression.

(Indeed, he is a guy that doesn't give out the feeling of tension in what kind of situation are we in. The battle won't start immediately, still, if we allow him to do as much as he wants, it might affect the morale.)

At that point, Harrigan gave Naga a warning telling him to act more prudent.

– If you fool around much, I'll push you off of that cliff.
– No, I got it I got it. I'll act more carefully, and with that, I won't do it again.
– I'll appreciate it as long you can understand that.

Glaring at Naga, Harrigan returned back to her post.

– We can't challenge them from here. We have no choice but to wait til dawn and let them make their first move.

After being told by Harrigan, Lela and Linna, too, wrapped inside their cloths and stood on guard while sitting on the platform floor.

Naga, as well, decided to sit down quietly and wait for dawn.

On the sky, which was still covered with the veil of darkness, there were only two moons – a big moon and a small one- appearing together with the stars. Nevertheless, he understood that the east side of the sky was slightly turning white.

After a while had passed, the black night sky drew back 1/3 to the west, with the mid-air slowly turning into an ultramarine color. And then, the east side of the sky changed into a madder red.

7

Finally, the sun rose.

Naga stood up while slipping out from the cloth he was wrapped around with. As soon as the morning chill soaked inside his body, his drowsiness disappeared. What he sensed was a feeling of his body tightening.

Once he walked closer to the edge of the platform and gazed over the surroundings, the view that could be described as 'marvelous' unfolded before him.

Right in front of the wooden fence, there was a vast land stretching out. On the left and right side, there were cliffs that continued to sink perpendicularly, creating a 300-400 meter elevation. On the opposite side of that, a land consisting of vastness and protrusions stretched far away, below his eyes. Inside the vast land, there were several large rivers streaming like big snakes with their scales reflecting the sunlight. Thin dark lines were probably branches that separated from the large rivers. What divided the floating clouds in the blue sky and the large land was a high mountain range covered with snow remains. There was also a 40 degree inclined steep slope appearing before his eyes. The steep slope, which was illuminated by the morning sun, didn't grow any trees, and on the lowest part, figures of people wriggling around were clearly seen.

Everything looked so splendid that it was incomparable with the country Naga had known.

Despite him not remembering his home country, a clear picture of a cozy countryside, forest, rivers, and ponds unexpectedly surfaced in his mind.

What kind of land was it? What kind of mountains and rivers were there? Naga couldn't recall anything at all, but nevertheless, he sensed a strong feeling of homesickness at this image.

It seemed as though his heart was tightened by that dear memory, however, he quickly switched his focus to reality. For him, a different world, which he had never heard or seen, was already the reality.

Naga strived to grasp the current situation.

The enemy's scouting troop, which charged ahead of the others, gathered at the bottom of the steep slope and were only peaking at the situation above. As far as one watched that, it seemed that the enemy were probably not planning to carry out an assault on the fort, just as Harrigan implied. Despite that, no matter how high the fort was to be built, one could probably anticipate the enemy climbing the plateau, making the defending side unable to maintain and bear the assault.

If so, then what will they do in case the enemy decides to climb up? – Naga shifted his eyes toward Harrigan after drawing that judgement. Nevertheless, she was enthusiastic in her a deep talk with Lela and Cu. It didn't seem like they planned to carry out any action right away.

As soon as Harrigan noticed his sight, she turned her head toward him. Lela, Linna, and Cu as well, directed their eyes toward Naga at the same time.

– What's the matter? Is there anything you want to say?
– No, I was thinking that now is the right moment to strike the enemy, but… don't you plan to do so?
– We will counterattack once they commence their attack. For that we have something prepared for them.
– Ha? You do? What's that?
– That's why, what I mean is a weapon used to fight them back.
– Is that so? I guess it would seem so. So, how do you plan to strike them? Do you intend to throw stones? No, perhaps, it would be simpler to drop logs from this position?
– Stones? Logs?

Because Harrigan frowned her eyebrows, Naga felt again being seized with anxiety.

– You don't attack the enemies that climb up with stones or logs?
– I see, so there were such methods as well?

Seeing how Harrigan admired him with a serious face, Naga lost his spirit.

– S-So it's something different?
– It is different. I think your methods are interesting, still, they are hard for us to execute.
– Why is that?
– However many trees we want to lumber, preparing logs for pushing off the enemy's troops takes lots of time. With the number of people we have, making large quantity of logs is next to impossible.

Being told that way, indeed, it seems to be so – Naga smiled wryly while uttering these words inside his heart.

– In that case, how do you plan to attack them? There's no way for you to shoot them with arrows, right?
– That's what we will use.

Because Harrigan walked from the edge of the watchtower to the other side and pointed down, he hurriedly went there and looked at where her finger was pointing.

On the ground, there was a large cart placed in the middle of the fort. The cart, which was covered with a cloth, carried something which seemed to display a thick bulge while being surrounded by the witches standing below Ais. Judging from the bulged part that was covered with the cloth, the whole entity seemed to be more than 3 yards (around 2.7 metres) of over-all length, and about 1 yard (0.9 metres) wide.

After Harrigan said 'we will strike with that', one would expect it to be some sort of a weapon, nevertheless, Naga had not the slightest idea about what it could be.

– It's probably not a catapult.

Once he muttered, a smile appeared on Harrigan's face.

– Are you interested?
– Well, of course I am interested.
– From now on, it's time for us to make our move. I'll give you a close up look.

Harrigan grabbed the handrail and shouted at the direction beneath her.

– Ais, take off the cloth. I'm coming down.

Looking up, Ais answered with a yes while waving with her hand.

Once Ais gave a signal, the witches quickly gathered around the object lying on top of the cart. As soon as the ropes were untied, the cloth was collected and folded.

8

– W…..What's, that?

Naga, who opened his eyes widely, leaned forward vigorously, as if almost dropping from the handrail.

– That's a wooden puppet.

Pulling back his upper body, Naga slowly turned towards Harrigan.

– A wooden…. puppet?

While having lots of questions floating in his head, Naga asked.

– What's that for?
– To attack the human soldiers, of course.

He once again looked at the human-shaped puppet, which lay down on the cart.

No matter how he would look at it, it was just a large-sized wooden puppet.

How do they plan to attack the enemy with that? – Naga didn't have the slightest idea.

– I don't get the meaning behind that.

While he clutched his hair, his shoulders were tapped by Harrigan, who got closer.

– I'll show you how it works. Hey, don't idle and go down.
– Is that so? Understood. Well then, I'll go down first.

While holding to the ladder, Naga descended ahead.

(What's the matter? Doesn't he seem overenthusiastic?)

Despite her thinking suspiciously, Harrigan placed her foot on the ladder.

– Lela and Linna too, go down. Cu will continue to stay on guard.

Harrigan, who gave the orders, started to go down, however, in the middle of doing that, once she looked below, she noticed Naga stopping midway while staring up zealously.

– What's wrong? Weren't you interested in the wooden puppet? Why did you stop midway? If you stop there, we won't be able to get down.
– Well, it's just that the view is so good.
– Aah? What are you talking… wait, Haaa!?

Harrigan finally realized the correlation between her own posture and Naga's position. Despite her late reaction, she noticed that the inside of her long skirt was completely exposed when being gazed upon from below of the ladder.

– Doing that at a time like this, are you a complete fool!?

Following that, Harrigan kicked him. Once her sole sunk into his face, Naga fell off the ladder while giving out a shriek – Ugyaa. His back struck against the ground, hard.

Feeling irritated, Harrigan descended straightaway from the ladder and stood next to Naga, who was groaning and crawling on all fours while holding his back.

– Even though I told you to restrain yourself last night, JUST WHAT ARE YOU DOING!?

– Ah, no, please don't yell at me.

Crawling on his hands and feet, Naga directed his face toward her.

– Being able to see such a lovely view, when we were climbing, made me want to see it once again, you see.

Eh?! – Harrigan unintentionally held the hem of her skirt; nevertheless, she realized it was meaningless now.

– Youuu…..
Harrigan's hair moved shiveringly and tied itself up into a bundle, changing its shape into something like a big hammer. In the next moment, it rose up.

– Try dying once!!

The big hammer-like hair was swung down vigorously, making Naga forget about the pain in his back and scream loudly while tumbling on the floor.

BAM!

The surface, on which Naga was lying a moment ago, had a circular indention. It wasn't that much of a hollow, still, it was a terrific power, which was unthinkable of mere hair. Naga, who avoided the hit by a hair's breadth, rose up with a desperate expression on his face and thrusted his finger in her direction.

– Just what are you doing?! If I hadn't avoided it, I would be dead.
– I was planning to kill you?

In front of him, Harrigan was glaring him. Her grim face was indeed scary, but her big hammer-like bundle of hair, which floated and revolved above her head, was much more scary.

– W-wait. Calm down. You won't gain anything from killing me, will you?
– Wouldn't that make the worry of having the interior of my skirt getting peeked at and having my breasts groped disappear?

A cold sweat appeared on Naga's forehead as he became stiff.

– Well, I don't particularly think it's something worth to be scolded over, still, it's not like I care.

(No no, you certainly want to scold me. Rather than that, haven't you come to kill me?)

– Aah, I understand. I'll restrain myself.

Taking a deep breath so as to calm down, Harrigan released her bundle of hair.

– Because I've never worked together with a man, perhaps I too should have some responsibility for being somewhat defenseless.
– Right? It's not solely my fault?
– Don't turn on me like that, you pervert!

Harrigan glared at Naga with her sharp eyes; nevertheless, her expression suddenly loosened up showing a sign of pity as she said.

– You, if you do a stunt like this in front of Yuuki, you will surely be killed.

Naga, who previously witnessed things more amazing than 'this stunt', tightened his expression so as to show that he understood it while feeling a cold sweat circulating inside his heart.

– Yeah, I got it. I'll reflect on my action, so please forgive me.
– Are you honestly reflecting on your action?

Harrigan asked with a doubtful face, but Naga closed one of his eyes and tapped his chest powerfully.

– I am, I am. I'm sincerely reflecting. Anyway, in terms of reflecting on oneself, there's no guy more superior than me.

(T-This guy… he doesn't seem to be reflecting at all. I give up. Was this man just an idiotic pervert? No, I thought that such thing wouldn't be possible, but…)

Harrigan breathed out a small sigh.

– Uhm, ane-sama, if we don't prepare it soon, the human soldiers might climb up…

Being called from the side by Ais, Harrigan remembered the situation.

– Ah, that's right. We should hurry.

9

Naga and Harrigan stood next the cart surrounded by the witches and Ais who was on it. The big wooden doll was coiled with several thick layers of leather used for protecting its torso and limbs against bow and arrow attacks.

Naga, who looked at the wooden doll from a closer range, noticed that its limbs weren't attached to its main body. What's more, he also noticed that the hands and feet weren't connected to the elbows and knees. However, if it wasn't just that. Looking more closely, there were 3 sets of each part, such as the head, torso, both thighs, lower legs, heels, toes, both upper arms, elbows, wrists, and the fingers from both hands. Together they were divided into as many as 20 components.

(Are they going to assemble it now? But, there are no hollows to which they can plug the parts nor protrusions sticking out from arms and legs?)

Noticing Naga's sight and his confused expression, Harrigan nodded slightly.

– Yeah, I'm going to put the head and limbs together with this.

Harrigan comber her long black hair with her fingers.

What's the meaning of that? – Naga directed his puzzled face towards Harrigan; nevertheless, she jumped onto the four-wheeled cart without answering him.

Once she squatted near the space between the tip of the wooden doll's right leg and its torso, she cut off several strands of her hair. Moving with her fingers, the hair's both ends turned stiff.

Then she thrusted in one side of one of her hair strands into the torso and the other into the legs' cross section. Repeating that action several times, Naga understood that the torso and right leg of the doll were attached using her hair as the medium. Watching her for a while, Naga could predict her next actions. He could tell, however, he couldn't clear his doubt about whether it would work or not.

After repeating the same work again and again with a casual attitude, all twenty parts were finally attached using her hair. Because it seemed that she was used to it, the labor didn't take long.

– Well, this should do it. Lela!

Being called by Harrigan, Lela jumped onto the cart and pasted charms, which she had in her hands, on various places of the doll. To Naga, the charms' handwriting looked like wriggling earthworms, making him wonder about what was as actually written on them.

Besides the torso, she also pasted the charms on the arms and legs. After she managed to attach around a dozen charms, both her and Harrigan jumped off the cart.

Harrigan ordered the girls who were gathering around.

– Step back.

Seeing how the other witches quickly withdrew, Naga also stepped back hurriedly.

Harrigan closed her eyes and concentrated her spirit. She muttered some words inside her mouth as if chanting something.

Clang.

A sound was heard on the cart. As Naga looked towards it, he opened his eyes widely.

Before one could notice, the gaps between the neck, limbs, and torso disappeared. The knees, elbows, and ankles also seemed to be perfectly united.

The wooden doll, with all of its part attached, certainly had a human form.

(Is that so? That Harrigan. She said that attacking with her hair was just a part of her magic. I see, is this the real use of her magic?)

In front of Naga, who was filled with surprisement and admiration, the giant wooden doll tried to move.

The doll lifted its knees and stretched its arms horizontally.

Slowly and steadily, the giant doll rose its upper body.

– Rise puppet, let my power bring you into life.

Making creaking sounds, the wooden doll's upper body straightened perpendicularly; nevertheless, it's movements wouldn't stop. As if it didn't weigh anything at all, the doll moved upward without any changes.

The doll's lower back lifted.

The doll, which lifted its lower back without any obstruction, continued to rise while supporting its bending body with the soles of the feet and with an unnatural posture. Finally, it stood up on the cart. It was a movement impossible for a human being.

Naga could understand how enormous it was once it stood up.

He looked up at the wooden giant's appearance with a dumbfounded face.

Soon, the doll stepped forward with its right leg.

Even if this huge doll was made from the wood, it was considerable heavy, making the cart look like it wanted to break.

The puppet put its leg down.

At the same time the sole of its foot reached the ground, Naga could feel the impact passing through his feet.

The surface trembled once more as the puppet stept down with its left leg.

Naga gazed at the giant, which stood in front of his eyes, with a quite complex expression showing astonishment, surprisement, and disbelief.

– How is it? This is our weapon. Are you surprised?
– Well… I'm surprised… that anything can surprise me.
– Hahaha, is that so?

Harrigan laughed pleasantly.

– What's moving it? It's your magic… right?
– That's right, as you can see, the limbs and the neck are connected to the body thanks to my hair. By transferring my magic into it, I can fasten each component of its body. What's more, the hair that I planted in each part previously plays the role of supplying the doll with my magic. At the same time, they create a circuit flowing inside its whole body.

– This thing is amazing, really amazing.
– Yes, yes, be more surprised, praise me more.

(This woman, isn't she just boasting about herself? Well, there's nothing wrong with that, I guess.)

– Then, how many of them are you planning to sortie?
– No, just this one.
– W-What?!

At Harrigan's reply, Naga couldn't hide his confusion.

– Just… this one?
– If it's against a force of around 100 enemies, then this one will be enough.
– No, well, if their number is around 100, it's possible to kick them around, but assuming you're attacked by several hundreds of them, it won't be that simple. Ah, could it be that this guy has some sort of a special attack? Like spewing out fire or bringing down lightning?

– It doesn't possess such things.

Naga dropped his head.

– It's possible for Lela to burn the attached charms using her magic, still, that's the last resort attack. By doing so, we can plunge the burning puppet into the enemy. If we happen to do so by any chance, we still have spare dolls, so it's not like we are unarmed.
– If there are spares, how about sortie them at the same time?

Harrigan gave a small shake with her head.

– When it comes to a large-sized puppet like this one, I can't control many of them at the once.
– Then, you are sending just this one to the battlefield in the end? How do you plan to fight them?
– You're asking this and that. With its big size, that doesn't matter. It can blow away the approaching soldiers with a single swing of its arms.

(Hey, are you joking!? despite you being able to use such an incredible magic, your main choice is primitive hand-to-hand combat!?)

Naga couldn't suppress the sense of discomfort gushing out from the inside of his heart.

– You seem to be somewhat dissatisfied.
– No, it's not like that, but…

(Hm? A large-sized puppet like this one, she said?)

– Harrigan.
– What, Naga?
– If there's a doll smaller than this one, then could you operate several of them at the same time?

Harrigan frowned her eyebrows.

– Why are you asking that?
– I just thought that it would become a good reference…or so, but…
– I wonder, perhaps it's not like I can't.

(So in other words, she has never tried it yet.)

– By the way, assuming they are half as big as this one, how many can you control? Perhaps 2?
– No, if it's half the size… that's right, it may be 4 or 5. However, when it comes to operating several of them at the same time, I cannot move them freely.
– Ah, is that so? So this is the problem?
– That's right, Therefore, I can't use that tactic for the battle.
– Even if you tell me while thrusting out your chest, you know…n-no, wait. Then how about a quarter?

A quarter is after all a fourth part of the original size; nevertheless, it could be 1 yard tall (0.9m) as well.

– If that's the case, then 10… no, perhaps more? I might be able to control as many as 20.

So that means, that the smaller the doll, the less magic is needed to control it.

– How about making them the same height as me?
Harrigan ran her sight from the top of Naga's head to the tip of his toes.
– I wonder. With your height, probably 40 or 50 should be fine. I haven't tried it or thought about it, so I can't tell you exactly.
– And if they're half of my height?

Harrigan finally had an astonished face.

– Even I'm able to perform that, what are you telling me to do? It may only serve as a playmate for kids, but….
– That's why, I'm telling you it's for reference.
– Hmm, a wooden doll which is half of your size, you say?

She cocked her head repeatedly.

– I wonder about that. I might be able to control around 100 of them, but as I told you just before, the more the dolls number, the more restricted their actions become. If it's such a number, it might be only be able to repeat any prearranged, simplistic movements. But that means it won't be of any realistic use in battle.

Harrigan placed her palm on her waist level toward the ground and moved it left and right.

– With puppets of this size, it doesn't matter how many we are able to make, they won't scare or surprise the humans, right?
– Well, I wonder about that. I don't quite get it, but somehow I understand what you mean.
– Which one is it!?
– No, sorry for interrupting you.

Naga waved his hand while saying – please continue.

As always, I don't get his way of thinking. – Harrigan thought. As she turned towards the wooden puppet, Cu's voice was heard from the watchtower.

– Ane-sama, the leading force of the human army has started to climb the slope!

Because the night broke into dawn, the human army began to move.

– Hm, so they've come. Fine, I'll send the puppet out. Open the gate.

Receiving the order from Harrigan, Ais rushed to the fort's gate

I see, so the reason why the gate's scale was this big was because of the puppet. – Naga thought.

Pulling up the huge bar alone, Ais pushed open the big gate.

– Alright, let's go!

As soon as Harrigan moved her hand, the giant puppet set out slowly towards the opened gate while making the ground tremble.

– Close the gate. Everyone, take your assigned posts.

Ais pulled the gate, closing it as it was before. Once she lightly held the bar, which was as thick as a human's body, and put it back, she reinforced the gate using a prop.

– Let's climb the watchtower once more.

After Harrigan waved to Naga, he hurriedly run up to her.

– Hey, is it really fine not to operate the wooden doll?
– The visibility is much better from the watchtower. I can make the doll do more complex movements if I can watch it.
– I see. But, is it fine for it to distance itself?
– As long as it's a distance in which I can see it, I'm able to control it at my own will.

Saying only that, Harrigan started to run.

Despite him being filled with surprise and admiration for their magic, which was a big deal, Naga had a sense of discomfort gushing up from his heart. While folding his hands and pondering hard, it didn't feel like there was anything out of place in his or their way of reasoning.

Naga couldn't quite understand what he was worried about, still, there were some thoughts which wouldn't leave his mind saying that it was wrong.

– No, let's just leave it. I better confirm with my own eyes how Harrigan plans to fight using the doll. Speaking of which, climbing the ladder, does it mean that I'll be the last? So, once again, I'll have the chance to peep?

He looked at the direction of the watchtower; nevertheless, while he was pondering, the witches were already done climbing.

(What? That's boring. Even though I was thinking about trying to touch them apart from just peeping.)

Despite saying that he would reflect on himself, he wasn't the sort of man to learn his lesson.

Grabbing hold of the ladder, Naga moved his limbs as he quickly climbed to the tower.

10

Harrigan moved to the watching platform, which was surrounded by a handrail, and looked below with a stern face.

Cliffs were running through from both the left and right side, however, only the front of the fort was made from a steep angled hill instead of a cliff.
Outside the fort, the giant puppet was facing toward the slope and about to advance.

As if pushing aside the witches that lined up near Harrigan, Naga stood next to her.

Watching the wide scenery which unfolded in front of him, Naga's body suddenly trembled. That was neither due to anxiety nor fear, but joy. Or perhaps, due to his expectations.

He still didn't know much about the current world.

What kind of people lived here? What kind of things existed? Naga couldn't tell any of these things.

Just from looking at this extensive scenery, his chest gushed, naturally, with a certain type of a determination.

If he's told that there's no end to wars in this world, he will put an end to them.
If this world splits into multiple, small countries divided by conflicts, he will unite them.
If in this world, humans and witches can't get along with each other, he will establish a society where they both can coexist.

In front of this spacious world, not just his body, but also his heart trembled. Waa – As soon as shout of joys rose up from his surrounding, Naga's attention was brought back. Directing his sight below of him, the giant, wooden puppet descended skillfully toward the middle of the acute slope, facing the human army that was preparing to release their bows near the slope.

Standing next to Naga, who was gazing at the doll he had never seen before, Lela became a bit mindful about his attitude. Nevertheless, she decided to switch her focus on the battle by looking distantly at the scene as she deemed it to be more important right now.

It looked as though only half a dozen flying arrows were aimed at the puppet. However, half of those fell down to the ground without piercing through the leather belts coiling around the doll's body. With most of the arrows that only managed to get stuck in the leather, the doll continued to approach, making it seem like it didn't receive any damage.

A wooden puppet is a wooden puppet. It didn't seem to make any difference whether the doll would get pierced or not.

Naga, who thought it was strange to put the belts around the puppet, faced toward Harrigan with the intention of expressing his doubts; nevertheless, she would frown her eyebrows and grit her teeth while looking straightly at the doll and murmuring something inside her mouth.

(Is that so? So she's controlling the wooden puppet with her chant? Guess, I'll be interrupting if I call out to her now.)

Not knowing what to do, Naga noticed Lela who was looking into the scenery next to him and poked at Lela's shoulder frequently.
– There's something I'd like to ask, but is it fine?
Naga thought that she would decline as she frowned a bit her eyebrows; nonetheless, she nodded.
– Fine, Wha-t?

As soon as he asked and pointed out at the direction of the doll, Lela, who got hooked, shifted her sight below, toward the puppet.

– That doll isn't alive, right? In that case, why do you need to envelop it leather? Whether it's hit or not, it won't change much?
– It do-es.

Lela murmured.

– It's Ane-sama's magic that allows it to mo-ve. The magic, which circulate inside its whole body, is distributed using her inserted ha-ir. One or two arrows won't have any big effect, but if dozens of them manage to pierce through, the magic circulation will be disturbed and hinder-ed.
– Fuun, so it was because of that?
– That's right. With the magic flow being obstructed, it will be more difficult to operate the doll swift-ly. In the worst case, it will cease to move at that place and be brought down.
– I see. Even a powerful weapon can't be omnipotent.

"It's true that I looked down on you. That's why, I apologi-ze."

This admission took Naga by surprise. He scratched his head bashfully.

"Oh, i-is that so? Hahaha, oh well, it's fine as long you understand, still…"

"You've grown impu-dent."

"Are you praising me or making fun of me? Decide which one."

"Well then, I'm praising yo-u. Unlike your foolish and perverted looks, you've got a brain, so I'm impress-ed!"

“Oi! You’re clearly harassing me with that praise!”

“That’s not tru-e. I’m giving you quite a com-pliment. It’s rare for me to speak well of somebo-dy.”

(Do you seriously believe that?!)

Naga reacted inside his heart. He directed his thumb at his chest.

“Even if I do have a sharp mind, aren’t I just a male human? Are you really fine with that?”

“Be it men, women, or witches it doesn’t matter to me as long they’re clev-er. Saying those words about yourself though, makes you seem conceited.”

“KUAHAHAHA!!!”

Naga instantly burst out laughing.

“Now ain’t you an interesting fellow despite that stern attitude of yours?”

Lela muttered while narrowing her eyes suspiciously.

(That’s not all… The way he tried to steer the conversation to grasp my weaknesses and opinions isn’t something I can make light of, still, that’s what makes him intriguing.)

“…UAHAHA” – Naga continued to laugh heartily, all the while ignoring Lela…

Suddenly, Harrigan’s hair struck down violently.

“Ow, ow, ow, ow stop with the hair AAAHH! I give!”

Holding his head in pain, Naga writhed on the ground.

“Shut up! You’re distracting me!”

Harrigan raised her shapely eyebrows and glared daggers at Naga.

Aside from Lela, the other witches pierced him critical and disdainful eyes.

Naga stood slowly while comforting his bruised head and raised his right hand in a casual apology.

“ …Yeah, sorry, um my bad.”

“I thought I had already told you not to interfere.”

“No seriously, I’m truly sorry. I’ll stop being a nuisance, so please rest assured and continue your work.”

“The next time, you cause a problem, I’ll throw you off of here.”

She threatened while her face slowly returned to her normal expression. Nevertheless, Harrigan’s eyes seemed to be smiling and it didn’t seem like she was seriously mad.

(Good grief) – Naga, breathed out a sigh of relief only to notice Lela watching him fixedly.

“What?”

“As expected, you’re a foo-l. Despite being smart, you’re still an idiot.”

Naga’s face twisted up into a wry smile.

“Yeah, I’ve got a feeling that people have said similar things about me before.”

“By who-m?”

“Hmmm…..hm? I wonder who told me so?”

Looking at Naga who had bent his head to stare at the ground, Lela lowered her eyes.

“My ba-d. After all, you’ve lost your memories.”

“No, it isn’t something worth apologizing for, so don’t mind it.”

“Then, I won’t min-d!”

“Actually, on second thought, you should mind a bit.”

“Decide on which o-ne.”

Ignoring Lela’s retort, Naga shifted his sight towards the strange tool in Lela’s hands.

“Hey, can I ask you one more thing?”

“Still not finish-ed?”

“What is that thing you’re holding near your eyes?”

Taking her eyes from the tool, Lela slightly adjusted something that looked like lenses placed inside a pair of slender tubes.

“These are called binocu-lars. A magic tool that magnifies and clarifies things seen from a distance.”

“Magic…tool?”

“Meaning a tool that has magic implement-ed.”

“Do you have to apply magic while using it? In that case, wouldn’t I be unable to see anything even if I took a peek?”

“You won’t se-e. It’s meaning-less.”

“Is that so? In the end I guess I can only depend on my own two eyes.”

Naga gave up on the tool and once again focused his eyes on the slope to observe the battlefield.

There was no way for the doll to be completely covered in leather belts, especially where it had joints. However, those parts didn’t seem to receive very many arrows. On the other hand, the parts which were wrapped with leather were pierced by many arrows, but they did not seem to affect the doll’s movements. Several layers of leather had been chipped off, but the iron-made arrows didn’t sink too deeply into the puppet’s main body.

Ignoring the close range blows coming at it, the puppet sluggishly plunged towards the human forces.

The wooden doll began to corner the gradually retreating soldiers as it continued to advance further.

The puppet picked up nearby rocks from the slope of a small hill in both of its fists and tossed them skillfully in the direction of the crowded soldiers.

The formations of the human troops dispersed and the soldiers skittered away like baby spiders.

Once the dust and smoke settled down, Naga could see several soldiers tripping and falling in their haste. Folding his arms across his chest, his face turned solemn and stern for the first time since his arrival in this world. Naga gazed at the strange scenery which he had never experienced before.

It was completely different from what he had felt during the battles he was familiar with.

(I wonder what the battles I knew….looked like. I think the first thing was shooting each other…with bows, probably.)

Assuming he was right, the beginning of this battle shouldn't be much different from the one he generally knew. At least, the human side was behaving as he expected unlike the witches side. There was one fact, however, which greatly strayed from Naga's concept of a battle.

It was this giant doll which was coiled with belts and controlled with magic. It swung its arms, threw rocks, and plunged into enemies while cornering them. Naga noticed himself accepting this fact calmly despite the fact that it was bizarre in every aspect.

(If this sort of thing is common in this world, I can only accept it.) – is what he honestly thought.

The 40-50 person troop in front of the doll hurriedly retreated.

It looked as though they were forced off the slope and onto the plain. However, between the people who were dispersing left and right, fast moving silhouettes were approaching the doll which had descended on to the plain.

Four horsemen were galloping towards the doll. What was more, was that they were pulling something.

There was a considerable distance between the top of the watchtower and the bottom of the slope. However confident Naga was in his eyesight, he was only able to see horses and people as miniscule specks. Because of that, he couldn't tell what they were pulling at first.

(Ah! Isn't that a battering ram?)

The moment he confirmed what the horse-riders were pulling, he understood. He knew exactly what the human troops intended to use it for.

As he watched, the wooden puppet moved its legs and tried to advance further.

"Oi, Harrigan!"

Naga's angry voice startled the witches who sat nearby.

On the other hand, Harrigan who was clearly angry, turned around slowly to face him.

"You! I told you that I'd throw you off if you were to—"

"Quickly withdraw that puppet!"

"W-What are you–?!"

"Do it fast! At least, try to bring it half-way back to the slope!"

“Why is that?”

“Just do it!”

Harrigan looked at his expression and realized that this was serious.

“Understood. But, I will have you explain yourself to me afterwards.”

Turning back around quickly, Harrigan screwed up her eyebrows in anxiety and followed Naga’s request.

As she did so, the puppet stopped and began to slowly retreat.

(Damn, its movements are dull. At this rate, it won’t make it in time!)

Naga almost cursed aloud when Lela suddenly screamed while looking through the binoculars.

“Ane-sama, it’s a battle ra-m! I think the enemy is trying…to knock the doll with the ra-m!”

“What?!”

Harrigan suddenly leaned forward.

“Get back! Hurry Back here! Return this Instant!”

The sudden shout burst out of her mouth and reached Naga who could now hear her clearly.

The battle ram drew closer until the point where it was clearly be visible with bare eyes.

“*Tch!*” – Harrigan smacked her tongue and called out an order in a sharp voice.

“Stop the blow!”

This order was screamed towards the giant wood doll. The puppet showed absolutely no intention of avoiding the blow, and instead put up a guard against the rapidly approaching ram. Its large build rendered swift movement nearly impossible. Its strongest asset was disastrous in this situation. No matter what type of weapon, there will always be strengths and weaknesses. It was just a natural course of action for the enemy soldiers to form a counterattack after experiencing battle with the witches.

Naga stared with bated breath at the situation unfolding in front of him.

The horses which came in front of the doll quickly split to the left and right with a pair on each side. Following that, the riders swung down with their swords and cut the ropes.

The heavy cart, on which the ram was placed, careened ahead with the speed lent by the charging horses.

The puppet was braced just between the edge of the slope and plain. In an instant the head of the ram slammed directly into the puppet.

(BOOMF!)

A dull sound of impact, like being socked in the stomach, resounded throughout the area. The ram itself was made from wood, but its tip was clearly covered in metal. As the impact echoed, the giant puppet was flung backwards and ended up lying on its back.

The human troops began to cheer wildly.

“Damn! Stand up! Get up now!” Harrigan cursed.

Struggling to rise, the puppet responded to Harrigan’s scolding by writhing with its limbs. It was barely able to get up in an unsteady manner, Harrigan smacked her lips.

“Tch, so it’s useless? Lela!”

“Yes” Lela responded as she took out the binoculars.

“It seems that the blow just now damaged the magic circuit. I can’t attack any longer nor bring it back.”

“Understoo-d.”

“Hold these” – Lela said as she passed Naga the binoculars.

“O-Oh?”

Lela forced the binoculars into his hands, and then stepped forward to the handrail of the viewing platform.

Lela faced Harrigan.

“Are you sure it’s fi-ne?” she asked.

“I don’t care. Just do it!”

Lela nodded slightly then took out a single charm from her bag.

Naga pressed the pair of binoculars against his eyes, but however much he tried to look through them, only a dim and gray world appeared.

(As expected they won't work for me?)

Naga put away the binoculars and was about to refocus on the battlefield when his eyes were arrested by the sight of the charm burning in Lela's hand.

(Ah, could it be!?)

Shifting his gaze in a hurry, he looked towards the wooden puppet.

Shortly after, gushing flames appeared on the doll here and there. Those were the charms which Lela attached to the puppet before it left. Naga understood that the charms were responding to the one she was holding.

(I see, she could do things like this as well… Should I say that it's fascinating, or perhaps unreasonable? Different plans might allow this to be used in more interesting and strategic ways…)

While thinking this, Naga concentrated on the doll to see what would happen.

The doll, now completely covered in burning flames, began to advance slowly once more.

Naga pointedly looked toward Harrigan as if asking *What are you planning to do?*

"Run and explode!"

She stated resolutely, and proceeded to order the doll.

Once she turned around, the puppet began to progress while swaying its trunk left and right. Despite telling it to run, its speed didn't increase significantly. Perhaps, it was the best it could do considering its large build and the damaged magic circuit.

Because the doll had fallen before, the human troop tried to approach it once again. The burning puppet walked while aiming for that crowd. Its movements were dull, but its steps were huge which made it faster than it looked.

The puppet waded in amongst the soldiers who cried out in fear while running in complete disarray.

Despite most of them trying to escape, there were those who tried to aim at the doll with their bows. An arrow that would maybe work normally, proved far less effective in this situation. Their actions were probably the result of their normal reactions mixed with the fear of seeing the burning puppet trudging in their direction.

Naga looked on dissatisfied at the quality of the troops' commanders and their orders.

Naga thought that the situation could have been dealt with more skillfully if he himself had taken command.

At that moment the doll's arms launched themselves forward.

To Naga, it looked as though the giant was shooting flaming arrows.

Its arms flew towards the slower soldiers and burst directly above their heads.

As if on Harrigan's command, the arms exploded, sweeping the soldiers away.

After this initial explosion the doll then launched its own head.

Unlike its arms which launched horizontally, the doll's head launched itself vertically at a steep angle above the slope while slowly correcting its trajectory. Naturally, the angle provided a greater range than that of the arms.

As the head flew above the soldiers who had tried to escape first, it exploded just like the arms, scattering flames in all directions.

Again, the explosion blew away many soldiers, with flaming embers and sparks igniting surrounding soldiers, making them drop and roll.

The soldiers were completely unprepared for this counterattack and immediately threw away their weapons and scattered in fear and confusion.

Naga watched the soldiers' clumsy escape from the distance and spat in disappointment.

(*These soldiers numbered around 200 and they're all running. There should be a limit to how pathetic you guys can act! But in comparison…)*

Naga peeked at Harrigan and her witches.

(Aren't they a little too strong?)

Naga felt a sense of respect welling up towards Harrigan and her people who had managed to repel an enemy of as many as 200 people. Even if they were witches possessing magic and special abilities, fighting like this wasn't simple by any means. A thought flickered through his mind as he was evaluating the witches. A small thought of wanting to fight by their side, but it was gone before he even realized it.

Naga turned his attention back to where the doll had exploded and scattered itself into dust.

As he did so, he heard Harrigan heave a huge sigh of relief.

“Are you alright, Ane-sama?”

The nearby witches asked as they supported her.

“Yes, I’m fine. And that went surprisingly well.”

Harrigan narrowed her eyes and gazed at the doll’s remains that lay upon the battlefield.

“We were somehow able to deceive them.”

Naga wondered what her muttering meant. His curiosity led him to guess at the meaning behind her words.

(….Could it be that she’s talking about the explosion just now?)

Naga focused his eyes towards the battlefield; however, there was no sign of anybody. Normally, Naga might suspect someone to be hiding in camouflage, but he felt that it was unlikely in this situation.

Naga thought at first that the enemy intended to run so as to lure the puppet into a place near the battle ram, nonetheless, their desperate running didn’t appear to be an act. In the first place, it didn’t seem like the enemy could have foreseen Harrigan’s explosive assault.

Thinking that it was the right moment to ask, Naga threw a question at Harrigan.

“Harrigan, may I ask you something?”

“Hm? I don’t mind, but…”

“It’s about what you just said, but by “deceiving” did you mean exploding that doll?”

Opening her eyes innocently, Harrigan asked back.

“Why do you think so?”

“I wonder…” – he murmured while looking up at the sky.

“You mentioned before that you have a few puppets in stock, right? That means you probably have 2-3, or at most 5 or 6 dolls. Since the number is scarce, losing one of them means a heavy blow to you. What’s more, you said that attacking the enemy with a burning doll would be your last resort, and that’s what happened this time. This means that you can’t afford to let the enemy know the actual number of dolls you possess.”

“It’s as you say.” – Harrigan grinned.

“We don’t want them to think that there are a limited number of dolls. By arranging an attack using the explosion, we want to give them an impression that we don’t care if we use 2-3 dolls of the same type.”

“So it was like that?” – Naga nodded with a pleased expression. As he did so, Harrigan said teasingly.

“Indeed, you’re quite smart despite your appearance.”

“You’re saying that too!? Just how stupid do you think I look!?”

“No, don’t mind it. A man isn’t just about looks, it’s what’s on the inside that counts.”

She casually stated. Hearing this Naga lifted his face and beamed.

“That’s right. A man is about what’s on the inside. As for women, It’s probably not only about their appearance.”

“Hm?” – Harrigan tilted her head confused. Naga gave her a big thumbs up.

“In other words, I think that not *only* do you guys have first-rate insides, all of you guys look beautiful as well.”

“Hm? I-Is that so? I guess we’ve received quite the high praise from the Dragon King.”

“Yep. That’s why, please, stop calling me dragon king.”

“Kukuku”

“Hahaha”

Facing each other, the two of them laughed.

As soon their laughter settled down, Naga asked.

“It looks like you managed to repel the approaching enemy for the time being, but what do you plan to do next?”

“We will do as usual. We will leave some people to watch and retreat to the 3rd fort.”

“Which means you aren’t going to pursue them… What’s the reason behind that?”

Harrigan narrowed her eyes towards Naga.

“You, are you trying to confirm your own hunch? Or perhaps, are you testing me?”

Surprised by Harrigan’s sharp insight, Naga decided to speak honestly to her.

“It’s not like I’m testing you, but I wanted to confirm whether or not my guess was right. That’s because this world isn’t a place where I can rely on my own common sense.”

“Well, I guess that’s fine” – Harrigan nodded and faced toward the vast land spreading out beneath her.

“Spreading out from here, the vast land of the humans stretches outward with mostly even terrain. There are lots of forests and mountainous districts, but, most of them are wastelands. Even if the area is a small plain the wooden puppet’s combat strength will fall because a proper army can be deployed to face it allowing it to be easily surrounded. If the doll is surrounded by a large army and showered with arrows from all directions, no matter how many belts it’s coiled with, the number of piercing arrows won’t decrease. When it comes to that, the magic circuit will be damaged. Not to mention, the horse-riders can release arrows as well, and if the doll is hit with a more powerful crossbow in a place with no obstacles, not even the belts will help.’

‘In that case, you’d think that it’s better to thicken its armor, but that is not possible. Were we to do so, the transmission of magic would be hindered.”

“How about using iron armor?”

“We don’t have enough skill to make that. In the first place, if we were to put it on the doll, we wouldn’t be able to transfer our magic.”

Hearing her calm and accurate analysis, Naga groaned.

Harrigan lightly shrugged her shoulders and finally added.

“Our low numbers keep us from starting a fight, so we can only assume a reactionary stance.”

“Is that…so? Well, I guess you’re right.”

Naga answered sounding unconvinced; he strongly believed that one can’t gain victory by only defending.

“Still, I can’t really say I like the tone of that comment.”

“Rather than saying you don’t like it, couldn’t you just say I’m not familiar enough with your circumstances? I’m unfamiliar with both this world and your current situation. That is why I’d like you to give me more time. I have some confidence in finding a way for you to win.”

Harrigan suddenly loosened her stern expression.

“Well, I’ll wait for that, though I’m not really expecting anything.”

After saying so, she tightened her expression once again and looked at the witches nearby.

“Then let’s withdraw. We will change the guarding post here. Lela, Selena, and Kei will stay this time instead of Ku, Rinne, and Rinna.”

“Understoo-d”

“Yes, Ane-sama!”

“Leave it to us!”

The three of them replied calmly.

“Ku, we still have 1 puppet left, right?”

“That’s right Ane-sama”

“We have spares in the village, so we need to bring one more here.”

Harrigan turned her head and looked at Ais.

“Ais, sorry to bother you, but I’ll entrust that task to you.”

“Yes, Understood Ane-sama.”

“O-Oi, it couldn’t be that **you’re** the one that carries the dolls to this place?”

Ais tilted her head toward the astonished Naga and gave him a look that seemed to say – *What are you so surprised about?*

“Yes, that’s right.”

“Y-you do this by yourself?”

“I usually get a little help, but basically I do it on my own as it is my duty.”

“Is that so? I got it. Then, I’ll help out as well.”

Naga decided to volunteer as he felt deeply moved by the witches’ courage and strength.

“Even though this guy said so, Ais do you want his help?”

Harrigan asked from the side.

“Um, but…” – Ais looked perplexed and replied sounding conflicted.

“This guy is someone who runs out of breath just from running here, for such a person to ask to help me…”

“Woah aren’t you being way too blunt and honest with that?!”

“I’m often told as much.”

“No, no, honesty aside that’s not what I meant. I tried to offer you help, so shouldn’t you show some casual gratitude at least? Say thanks or something like that?”

“You’re right, I apologize for my ingratitude.”

Ais gently bowed her head towards Naga.

“Despite you being easily exhausted by a mere half day of running, some help is better than absolutely nothing, so I look forward to working with you.”

“You absolutely don’t hold back with the honesty do you?!”

As he uttered this heartfelt cry, Lela added on her own comments.

“Far from being useful, it is complete-ly likely that he will be a nuisance, bu-t…”

“Yet another brutally honest tongue!!”

“Thank you, I’m often told tha-t.” Lela said with pride and thrust out her chest.

“Don’t say that like it’s a source of pride; though I really can’t deny that it’s the truth, can’t you be a little less harsh about it!?”

“As for me, there’s something I’d like to request from you. Will you give me a hand, Naga?” Ais asked.

“O….Oh. But, are you fine with that? Is it alright for someone like me, who doesn’t know anything about terrain or current matters, to help? I may end up dragging not just your legs but also your entire body down?”

“I don’t care if you drag me down just don’t grab my chest.”

“Hahahehe” – Naga laughed stiffly with a weak smile.

The other witches didn't seem to understand the circumstances, however Ais new the entire story from Harrigan. She showed him a smile that started at her mouth and never reached her eyes. He could feel a chilling intent from those eyes. He felt that they said *If you do the same to me, I'll crush your arms into pulp.*

As if confirming his worst suspicions, Ais clenched her fists several times while squeezing with visible force.

Feeling a fearful chill run down his spine, Naga violently nodded in agreement.

"Leaving the joking aside" – Harrigan said as she continued to talk.

"I want you to carefully observe, since you don't know anything."

"A…ah, so that's the reason?"

"I have good reason for this, by having you tag along with Ais, it is possible for you to learn about various things. You can observe the landscape, animals, plants, and features of the forest."

"I think you're right. Although I ran all the way here I wasn't paying attention to anything but running."

"For the time being, we drove away the human troop and made them go through a bitter experience, so it doesn't look like they'll be trying anything soon. So, Ais I might be troubling you, but can you let this guy try to help?"

"Yes, Understood Ane-sama"

Despite Ais's grand smile, Naga couldn't help but feel discontented.

"If you say it like that I feel like you're saying I'm the one who's likely to cause problems."

"The fact that you even dropped out of the sky onto our heads is already a big enough problem, so I don't think you need to worry too much about causing more."

"YES I DOOOO!"

Harrigan and Ais began giggling and it caused Selena, Dei, and Kei, who felt a bit nervous, to relax a little and smile. On the other hand, Lela's expression remained firm.

"The next time you carry a spare doll, bring some food as well. Ais, you got it?"

"Yes, Understood Ane-sama."

And just like that, Harrigan's group went back, leaving behind Lela, Serena, and Kei. Obviously, Naga also tagged along. Yuki, who had disappeared during the battle, suddenly reappeared without notice. She didn't even glance in Naga's direction, so he decided not to ask her anything. Even though the return trip was considerably slower and easier, Naga had not doubts that running couldn't compare to horses in speed and comfort. *(Is there anywhere I can get a horse?)* Naga thought wistfully as he ran through the forest.

Chapter 3 – The Offence and Defence of the 1st Fort, Again

The next day, Harrigan and the girls had returned to the 3rd fort.
Ais, who had finished her preparations, was about to return to the fort which had been attacked, bringing a spare doll and provisions.
Naga helped arrange the transportation as well.
He was not the only one helping, there were 2 other witches who would accompany them.
He was fine with one of them, but considering who the other was it could be considered as a terrible situation. The person in question was of the same opinion.

“I can’t believe this! Why do I have to go together with a man? I’ll kill him. I’ll kill him without anyone noticing, mince him into a thousand pieces, and throw his chopped up bits to the wolves. “

The one who kept uttering that disturbing dialogue was none other than Yuki. Far from trying to hide it, you could sense the hatred, disgust, and killing intent overflowing from her body. Naga immediately shrunk back as he felt that aura directed towards him.

“You don’t have to worry about Yuki. After all, she’s not completely serious.”
Ais said as if trying to console him.

“Not completely?… then, how serious is she?”

Ais bent her neck slightly and pondered a bit.

“Hmm… Like 8 out of 10?”

“That’s serious enough! There’s no way I can relax when I’m sure she’s just waiting for a chance to kill me!”

“Well well. You just need to endure it for a quarter of the day.”

Naga twisted his face in misery and moaned,

“No, I don’t want to face her even for a moment. I’ll end up receiving constant abuse just by being near her.”

Ais had told Naga on their way back that preparations could take as much as a quarter of the day. Naga seemed doubtful and asked Ais

“It took us a half day just to travel this distance at full speed, isn’t it weird that we can carry that huge doll over in a shorter amount of time?”

Nevertheless, she replied calmly.

“Ara, speak for yourself. There’s no way that that was the fastest speed we could achieve.”

“Ah…that’s right. Speaking of which, how long would it take you to get there at your top speed?”
“About an hour and a half?”

Naga looked at Ais as if she was joking. Despite that, she added calmly.

“If it was Yuki, she could reach the place much faster than us.”

“Oi oi, are you kidding? Just how ridiculous are her legs?!”

“I’m serious. To begin with, in her case, she doesn’t even have to run.”

“What do you mean?”

Hearing his question she simply forced a little smile.

“You’ll understand once you witness it yourself.”

It was clear she wasn’t going to tell him anymore than that.

(If she says that, does it mean Yuki is going to show me? More importantly…)

Naga began thinking about the current state of the witches.
He wasn’t able to make any solid conclusions because he had yet to understand this world’s current situation. However, Naga felt that sooner rather than later the witches would face a miserable situation.

Despite his memory loss, Naga firmly understood that it would be alright as long as they did not lose. However, if they were always on the defensive, they would eventually come up against a power that could swallow them whole. It would be impossible to survive without fighting and growing. No matter how desperate they were, or how well they could fight, the witches would eventually perish.
Naga did not want to let that happen. He wanted to lead Harrigan and the rest to victory as much as he could, even if it meant he would be interfering or it would make them think of him as an annoyance.
Therefore, the first thing he wanted to do was to strive to understand the current situation. For that reason, he was prepared to withstand any threat, verbal abuse, or bloodthirst that Yuki aimed towards him.

“Well then, we are leaving, Ane-sama.”

The large cart's bed was filled with the wooden puppet as well as a multitude of food bags covered in cloth. Ais was harnessed to pull the cart via a thick rope tied around her lower back.
She waved towards Harrigan.

"Ais, Nonoeru, Yuuki, I'll be entrusting this to you."

Another person that was assigned to help Ais and Yuuki was a witch named Nonoeru.
She appeared to be about 4 or 5 years old. She had a small stature and short hair with cute round eyes. However, she looked quite shy, which gave Naga the impression that she was kind of like a small animal or a mouse.
She was probably afraid of him as well.
The last time Harrigan and the rest had rushed to the fort, she had been in the forest instead of being in the village. Thus, she didn't make it in time for the battle. Because this was the first time Naga had met her since his return from the fort to the village, he had no knowledge about her.

(Not to mention, I don't even really know anything about the other members whom I've met besides from seeing them. The ones I personally know to some extent are Ais, Lela….and Yuki.)

Naga breathed a sigh of relief inside his heart.
He was thankful that among the witches it seemed that at least Ais had some common sense. Even if Yuki was to become violent, she would probably help stop her. Apart from that, it seemed she also possessed gripping and physical strength which was quite a threat to Naga, but…

"Please leave it to me."

Ais replied with a strong smile like always and Nonoeru lowered her head gently. Yuki, on the other hand, looked away in dissatisfaction.

Grrriiipp – Ais grabbed Yuki's pair of shoulders from behind.

"Yuki, is that how you bid farewell to Ane-sama?"

Ais's fingers sank into Yuki's shoulders

"Aw aw aw aw!"

Not being able to endure, Yuki raised a scream. Ais continued to grip her tightly. Her usually cheerful face seemed terrifying.

"Your farewell?"

"Aw aw, it hurts."

Ais loosened her grip slightly, but still wouldn't let Yuki go.

"No matter who it is, you must greet and part properly Yuki."

(Could it be that she's talking about me?) – Naga looked in their direction, but as one would expect, she simply turned away.

"Yuki."

Yuki's body shivered with fear and she couldn't ignore her once Harrigan called out to her.

"W-What, Harrigan-nee?"

"I'm relying on you Yuki. For us to carry this wooden puppet, your strength is indispensable, especially, during urgent times like this one."

"U…Understood. I'll do it properly."

"In that case, good."

Harrigan gave Naga a meaningful glance and he nodded in reply. She nodded back to him and she turned to face Ais.

" Fine, now go, Ais."

"Yes, Nee-sama. I'm off."

Ais began to pull the cart using the ropes attached to her waist; she took 1 then 2 steps forward. Once she did so, the cart's wheels began to rumble. Were the ropes restricting her movements? Ais advanced while bending her body forward as if carrying the weight on her back.
Naga too walked out. Since he was told not to push the cart, he didn't lend a hand.

He suddenly looked up into the sky. Daybreak was coming and the sky was covered with dim, gray clouds, nonetheless, it didn't appear to be raining.

As he glanced back he saw Harrigan and the rest behind her waving their hands in farewell.

(It feels like I've seen this scenery before.)

Naga proceeded with his walk while thinking on this faint memory.
Finally, the silhouettes of the witches disappeared in the distance.

They continued to walk down a small paved road as Ais moved at a brisk pace while pulling the heavy cart. Naga on the other hand, continued to walk empty-handed. (We're going pretty quickly.)

However, the road soon turned into a rough footpath. It was barely wide enough to let a single cart go through.
From that point on, it didn't seem they could keep the same speed however much they'd like to. Not to mention, were they to try anything reckless, it would probably become hazardous.
However, once Ais reached the start of the rough footpath she suddenly announced,

"Well then, should we try to speed up a little?"

"What?!"

Without realizing it, Naga let out a yell.

"You're a noisy, ain't you? I wonder if I shouldn't cut off your tongue."

Yuki looked at him as if he was a cockroach.

"No no, I mean it's impossible to move faster on this type of road."

Saying that, Naga pointed out the rough and uneven path in front of them.

"Maybe you can't understand because you're a fool, but it's not impossible. Not for me and Ais, you see. Perhaps a fool like yourself isn't meant to understand things that people with brains do, still…"

"Stop calling me fool over and over!"

Naga barked at her, then turned his doubtful gaze towards Ais.

"What's the meaning of this?"

Ais displayed her strong smile as usual and replied.

"In other words, we are often helped by Yuki's magic."

As soon as he heard that Naga looked at Yuki with keen interest. Yuki spat out,

"Can you stop leering at me with those disgusting, impure, lecherous, and filthy eyes? If possible, can you please immediately and completely disappear from this world? Whenever you're close to me the surroundings start to smell like rotten compost."

"Isn't compost supposed to be already rotten!?"

"Well then, you're generally more rotten."

"I'm not!"

“Whatever, don’t even glance in this direction, it gives me nausea and goosebumps all over my body.”

“Ah, is that so? Then, I won’t look at you at all.”

Sorry – As soon as he turned his face away, Ais apologized by raising her hand. Her smiling face too seemed somewhat strained.

Don’t mind, Don’t mind – Naga waved using his right hand.

“Then, I’ll be counting on you, Yuki.”

“Leave it to me.”

“Nonoeru, get on board.”

Nonoeru nodded and jumped onto the cart.

“Naga-san too, please get on the cart.”

He looked suspiciously at Ais but Yuki cut in from the side.

“Hurry up! Since the road ahead is in bad condition and steep, your leg strength won’t be of any use! It isn’t like Ais is doing this because she’s worried about someone pitiable as you. You’re a fool, indeed a big fool! Shouldn’t we leave a fool like him behind? Speaking of which, I want to do so. It would be better for him to get lost and die by the roadside.”

Naga looked extremely irritated but suppressed his anger like he had been asked to do by Harrigan and Ais. Looking at Ais, she urged him on.

“Yes, please get on board quickly.”

As soon as he jumped on, Ais gave a warning.

“You better hold on tightly to the ropes which are attaching the doll and the cart, okay?”

“Oi oi, is she seriously planning to run while pulling this heavily loaded truck on a narrow and coarse road like this?”

Naga gazed in turns at Ais and the small, coarse road ahead of them with eyes showing half curiosity and half incredulity.

After making sure that Nonoeru and Naga got on the cart and held the ropes, Ais looked toward Yuki and raised her hand.

“Then, please do it.”

Yuki stood behind the cart, closed her eyes, and concentrated while muttering something.

Shortly after, a wind started to blow through the still forest.
Naga understood straight it wasn't just an ordinary wind as it came from all directions and surrounded the cart.

A naturally blowing wind wouldn't act like that. In other words, this was probably…Yuki's magic.

Finally, the wind started to coil around the cart creating a spiral. Fallen leaves and dried branches were drifting together, but fell the moment the wind stopped.

"Done Ais."

Saying that, Yuki jumped onto the cart. Because she sat across from Naga behind the giant doll they were completely hidden from each other.
Naga somehow recalled this feeling of loathing and distance. He felt that he could have even spent his childhood without any love shown to him. That's why, he didn't really mind being shown hatred or a cold attitude, but, he couldn't say he felt nothing. Being detested was unpleasant, and it was painful to be abandoned.
Luckily, there was Harrigan who accepted him as he is. Therefore, it didn't feel uncomfortable to be among the witches. Rather than that, it was more pleasant to be acknowledged.
Besides her, there were other witches who considered Naga to be suspicious; nevertheless, they didn't express any ill feeling toward him like Yuki. However, he was mindful about her, or rather; he was hurt by the fact that she hated him so passionately.

(Still, she really does detest me, and there's no way for me to cheer her up. Saying so, I'd rather her not be so hateful.)

As he was contemplating on that he glanced at Yuki whose appearance was hidden behind the puppet, his body was suddenly jolted as the cart moved. Naga grab the ropes tightly.

To his surprise, the cart travelled with the same speed as before. Rather, it was becoming much faster. What also surprised Naga was the feeling that the ride was becoming much smoother.
In this era, where buffers weren't used for horse carriages or carts, the sensation coming from a riding on an uneven road surface was awfully bad. However well roads were built, the horse carriages and carts would sway in all directions with even a slight increase of speed. In the worst case, the axle would break down.
Even though this world should follow the same law of physics as in his world, it felt as if the cart was splendidly absorbing the shock coming from the uneven surface. Naga wondered what kind of mechanism doing this.
There was no reason for the road to better. No matter how he looked at it, it was as rough as it could be.

Its surface was uneven and there were small pebbles tumbling on it, even tree roots were sticking out from the road. Despite that, the cart didn't jump much nor sway.

Not being to endure his curiosity, Naga called out to the witch nearby.

"Hey, you. Ehh, was your name No…something?"

The girl sat upright and didn't try to run nor hide.

"It's No-Nono-Nonoeru."

"Nononononoeru?"

"W-Wrong. It's Nonoeru…."

"Ah, Nonoeru? Then, Nonoeru, there's something I'd like you to tell me, but…"

"W-What?"

Nonoeru gave the impression of being painfully shy, and her eyes which were directed at Naga looked around restlessly while she shook.

(As one would expect, she's just like a mouse.)
Naga's impression of her strengthened.

"Isn't the feeling of riding much comfortable in comparison with before? The cart isn't jumping or shaking even if we accelerate, or so it feels. Why is that?"

Since Nonoeru was confident she could answer that question, she breathed out a sigh of relief.

"That's, you see, it's because Yuki raises and supports the bottom of the cart using the accumulated wind."

"Ha?"

"After all, she's a wind user."

"Ehh….raising and supporting…..you mean, like reducing the weight of the cart?"

"You can understand it that way. Lela would describe this as a shock lessening device used to reduce weight by absorbing the impact. or so, but…"

Naga didn't seem to understand the theory; however, his senses were telling him it was fine even if he didn't get it.
He was the type of person who would accept the reality in front of his eyes as it is without

overthinking it. Even if he was to perceive someone else as extraordinary, he would instinctively think about the circumstances and go with the flow. And yet, that fact alone had been the cause of frictions between him and his surroundings. Despite not being able to recall his individual memories, Naga could sense it instinctively.

(Somehow, it feels like I lived in the same circumstances as the witches?)

Naga put a gruesome smile which could make one's blood run cold.
Seeing that, Nonoeru bent slightly backward with fear.

"No, I've understood it completely. Thanks"

Looking back at his face, the gruesome smile had disappeared. Instead a gentle smile took its place.

(E, Eh? Could it be that I was mistaken about the expression before? Or…)

Provided she was mistaken, was that brutal expression his true nature? Or was it the courteous one now? Not being able to tell which, Nonoeru became confused.

Taking his eyes away from her, Naga watched Ais pulling the cart.

Was it due to the supporting wind? As she pulled the cart small gusts of wind would gently flip Ais's skirt giving Naga little glimpses of her ass. It was quite a charming view. Nonoeru stole a glance at Naga, who was passionately staring at the view while having a lecherous grin, and thought.

(I've no idea which expression is this person's true character, but at least I know he's a pervert.)

Ais pulled the ropes while advancing diligently. It was already a speed which far exceeded the walking one. Despite them bending left and right, the cart wouldn't stray from the road even once. At this rate, they will indeed reach their destination within a quarter of day.
While watching the back of the earnestly pulling Ais, Naga felt a sense of admiration appear in his heart for her.
……..
Two and a half hours had passed.

"We will soon arrive."

Nonoeru who was watching the front spoke to Naga.

"Already? Rather than a quarter of day…not even 3 hours have passed, I guess."

"Yes. It seems we are arriving today a bit faster than usual."

(Is it due to Ais good mood? Or perhaps, due to Yuki's magic improving? Or maybe….)

Nonoeru glanced back at Naga.

(I'm not sure if it's because they don't want to be spotted by anyone that they're doing their best or because…)

At that moment a scream came from the back of the cart.

"Ais! Look at that, Look!!"

Before anyone had noticed, Yuki who was sitting on top of the doll pointed at the slope in front of them.
Ais slammed to a stop bringing the cart to a halt as well.

Naga held tightly to the ropes so as not to fall down.

"What's the matter, Yuki?"

Ais turned around and calmly asked. Yuki, on the other hand, was standing on the doll and was clearly in distress.

"It's smoke! There's black smoke rising from the fort's direction!"

Ais's expression changed.
Nonoeru gasped and looked as well.
Naga too faced toward the direction pointed by Yuki, unfortunately, he couldn't see the aforementioned smoke due to the tree branches hindering his view.

Ais untied the ropes that were hindering her and jumped high into the cart.
As she jumped her skirt flipped up and flashed a glorious view before Naga's eyes. Both the angle and the content were magnificent.

(Wait a sec, this isn't the time for admiring!)
Naga and Nonoeru immediately scrambled to get to the top.

Ais, who splendidly reached the top, looked the way Yuki was pointing while shading her eyes.

It was hard to keep one's balance on top of the doll's trunk because of its small curves; nonetheless, Naga maintained his foothold and immediately stretched out his body. Once he did so, he saw a single wisp of smoke was rising up into the blue sky in between the gaps of thick leaf cover and tall trees. It was clear that the smoke wasn't coming from cooking.
An ominous feeling came over Naga.

"Could it be that the fort is under attack?"

At Ais's voice, Naga's premonition was confirmed.
Provided that the fort raised a smoke signal due to the human forces attacking once more, what would happen to Lela and the rest stationed there?

A picture of Lela with a curt expression surfaced in his imagination, and the girl's unique way of speaking reverberated in his mind.

Naga gripped his sword's scabbard tightly in his left hand as he held himself back from desperately rushing towards the fort.

"I-If that's true….what should we do Ais?"

Ais thought for a short while and promptly decided.

"Obviously, we will go support them!"

At Ais's confident and strong assertion, Naga came back to himself.

"Yuki, fly to the fort ahead of us! You should probably be able to fly this distance without spending that much power, right?"

"Ah, yes. What about Ais?"

Ais looked at Naga who distanced himself a little bit.

"I'll carry Naga on my back while running."

Hearing that, he opened his eyes in shock.

"It should be fine for you to just leave this guy."

Yuki puffed her cheeks in displeasure.

"We don't have time for this Yuki! Go now!"

"S-Sorry."

Yuki leapt off the top of the doll and bent her body.

Naga leaned forward to check what she intended to do. As he did, Yuki took out something from the corner of the cart.

It seemed to be thin and wrapped in a cloth. It was about a foot in width and was almost as tall as Yuki herself.
She removed the cloth and tossed it on top of the cart.
From Naga's perspective, it had a shape of a board. Nevertheless, it was different from a

simple one.
The plank had a broad body that gently bent and thinned as it continued up to its head. The tip of it seemed sharp.
Even the tail curved slightly and thinned, however, the tail fanned out as it maintained its original width. From the sides of the plank and its tail, there were fish fin like protrusions sticking out from it.

As soon as she put both of her legs on the plank and adjusted her body, Yuki lifted her hand toward Ais who was standing on top of the doll while watching.

“I’m off, Ais.”

“Yuki, once you confirm the safety of Lela and the rest, try to buy them time to escape!”

“It’s fine for me to kill humans, right?”

“I don’t care, but first ensure your comrades safety!”

“Understood.”

Putting down her hand, the plank on which Yuki was boarding rose up softly. It looked as though the wind was dancing around Yuki while wrapping her body and lifting her up. The board began to slowly move.

(I see, so this is the magic that controls wind?)

While Naga made a small groan inside his heart and looked from the top of the puppet at the tray, the board on which she was boarding on suddenly shot up and immediately stopped in the mid-air. The board floated even higher than Ais and Naga.

“Well then, I’m going!”

“I’m relying on you, Yuki!”

The board that had stopped mid-air, shot ahead.

Naga saw off Yuki with an astonished face as she grew smaller and smaller.
As if riding a horse, she floated through the air and wove her way through the intervals between trees. Holding her left and right hands behind, she swayed her body repeatedly while attaining a perfect balance.
Her figure vanished within the blink of an eye.

“Grant me thy Blessings of power, thy Blessings of Earth, you who grants me thy support, Grant me the power of the Goddess”

It looked as though heat waves were exploding from Ais’s body as she chanted. The overwhelming aura that burst from her almost staggered Naga who was standing nearby.

Once Ais finished chanting, the surging heat subsided.

“Okay, we too should hasten ourselves. Naga-san please get on my back.”

Crouching down, she presented her back to Naga.

“W….What was that just now?”

“You mean that? That was my magic. I enhanced my body using that.”

Naga wondered whether or not Ais’s power had increased as her appearance didn’t particularly change.
As he was hesitating about what to do, Ais turned her head to look at him.

“I want to go this instant. If you keep hesitating I’ll knock you out and drag you along by your legs… are you okay with that?”

Her face was cheerful as usual, but Naga could see the veins pulsing in irritation on her forehead. It was quite frightening.
Without any second thoughts, Naga jumped on her back.
Grabbing firmly both of his thighs, Ais lifted him up easily as he weighed nothing. Because of that, Naga put his strength into both of his arms and held on with all his strength.

“I’m glad that…you decided to cling on securely, but I feel that there’s a problem here.”

“Ha?”

“Naga-san, your hands, your hands.”

Nonoeru poked him and pointed, Naga finally realized.
Since he jumped hurriedly, he hadn’t noticed that both of hands were inserted through her armpits. In other words, when he crossed his arms with his full strength he firmly and magnificently grasped Ais’s voluptuous breasts.

“Uhmm, sorry about that. B-by the way, I’m not doing this on purpose, you know?”

For the time being, Naga made an excuse.

“T-That’s why I’m telling you not to hold on so strongly like that.”

Ais twisted as her face blushed a deep crimson. Due to her twisting Naga had to grip on even more firmly to keep from falling down. And the result was…

“W-Wait, it’s no good, no good.”

Ais twisted and squirmed her body even more.
Naga was enjoying these amusing reactions and started to grope with his hands a little.

“Naga-san you’re doing this on purpose aren’t you?”

Nonoeru spoke with a cold penetrating tone. Hearing that, he immediately stopped his hands.

“No no, absolutely not. It was more I was simply confused and my unstable mental state caused such a mistake.”

(As one would expect, this person did it on purpose)

Nonoeru looked absolutely flabbergasted,

Naga released his hands that had been groping Ais and withdrew them from her armpits with obvious reluctance. Then, he moved them toward her shoulders and again tightly hugged her around her neck.

“Perhaps it’s better like this.”

“Ah mou…Even at a time like this is”

Squueeezze – Ais pinched the front of his right hand tightly.

“Aw aw aw!”

Naga suddenly felt the sudden intense urge to leap off, nevertheless, because his right hand was pinched and his left thigh was grasped, he was unable to move.

“If you do that next time, I’m going to snap your wrist. No rather than that, perhaps I should crush what’s between your legs?”

“U…Understood, Understood. More importantly, it’s an urgent situation, so let’s go, ok?”

Turning around, Ais glared fiercely at his face over her shoulders.

“Had you not done anything weird, we would be already running.”

(It’s the first time for me to see her face without a smile. Somehow this pouting expression is pretty cute)

Thinking so, Naga felt a bit pleasant.
On the other hand, Ais turned back her face in dissatisfaction and said bluntly.

“I’ll be running at full speed. I don’t care if you fall off, so hold on, got it?”

“I’ll be holding tightly, so you don’t have to worry.”

Naga put his strength into his arms with all his might as Ais lifted him effortlessly.

“Since there’s a shortcut, I’ll be going straight through the forest. Nonoeru, you too should hurry.”

After saying that, she broke into a sprint.

“UUWWAAA What’s This!?”

Naga let out a scream of surprise at Ais’s unbelievably fast pace. Nonoeru who was following quickly disappeared from his sight.

The trees were flashing by at terrifying speeds. As soon as he thought so, the trees had already passed by. It was quite possible that Ais’s running speed was much faster than those of horses.

Noticing a thick branch stretching out from a huge tree, Naga shouted.

“A branch, a branch, a branch!”

However Ais didn’t even try to avoid it, instead she leaned forward a bit and plunged directly into it.

“We’re gonna hit it! We’re gonna hit it!”

Naga became flustered to the extent of wanting to stop her with a stranglehold.
Despite his struggles Ais smashed through the thick branch with her head without slowing down at all. To think that she would snap the thick branch of the tree with a headbutt and run through like that.

Naga was filled with admiration and astonishment.

Naga felt a small shock coming from Ais’s back, as something ominous, or rather, ominous people appeared in his field of vision.
Figures of several enemy soldiers were moving as if patrolling the fort.

“Drop me off Ais, It’s the enemy.”

Having her shoulders tapped by him, Ais released Naga's thighs from her grip.
Naga jumped off her back and judged the current situation.
There were as many as ten enemies moving around this forest. They didn't seem to be fighting, so could it be that they were scouting? Or perhaps, the enemy troop was trying to siege the fort?

Whichever it was, there was no way for Naga to let them go after he encountered them.

"Ais, let's battle."

Ais straightened herself without realizing it at Naga's unexpectedly authoritative voice.

"Ah, yes."

"We are going to launch a preemptive attack. Pick those stone nearby."

"Yes?"

"Throw the stone. With your monstrous strength, it should easily reach the enemy."

"Certainly, the me right now has an enhanced body, but to call me monstrous, that's a bit…."

"Don't mind, just go. Our comrades at the fort are probably in danger."

Being told so, Ais hurriedly picked the stones at her feet.

"Even if you miss, it's fine. Just throw them at the enemy. I'll take that moment to approach them once they're distracted by your throws."

"Will you be fine?"

"If I take them by surprise, I should be able to manage somehow."

He drew his sword from its scabbard.

"I'm going to approach them in secret. The moment I get close enough, start throwing stones."

"Understood."

Naga moved between the shadows of the trees while hiding his body. As the enemies' eyes were focused on the fort, it seemed that he would be able to draw close unnoticed.
The time he closed the distance by half with the enemy, something cut through the air while passing by Naga's left side.

(Did Ais throw a stone?)

He opened his eyes wide and focused on the front, the flying stone struck the trunk of a tree near a large number of gathered soldiers, and produced a sharp sound of impact. The soldiers jumped up in surprise. Naga who hid himself between the trees as well understood. Once he turned around, an appearance of Ais springing out of the tree's shade and holding aloft the stones while throwing was seen.
Another stone flew and cut through the air.
This time throw was splendidly aimed at a single soldier as it sunk into his chest and threw him backward, making the soldier faint.

(That's indeed some power)

Naga felt astonished and even more respect for her, however, he couldn't remain standing like that.
The soldiers began to make a fuss as they confirmed Ais's presence.

One, two of them drew their swords and dashed over to her, nevertheless, there were those who dropped to the ground as they realized what was happening.
Ais threw stones at the soldiers who were approaching her.

"*Painful sounding grunt*"

Again, one more soldier was sent flying as he got hit by a stone.
Some of the stones that missed sank into ground creating cloud of dust, and some others caved in trees trunks.
The soldiers who witnessed her tremendous power realized that they couldn't dash over to her while exposing themselves. They slowed down and changed their plan by trying to hide behind the trees trunks

When it comes to this, it was only a natural course of action for their formations to fall apart.
That's when Naga struck.
He attacked the soldiers who were closest to him, he thrust the tip of his sword straight through the gaps in their armor through their necks.
Those were the ones who died instantly.
The soldiers died on the spot without a single sound.
The ones with whom Ais continued to distract weren't yet aware of Naga's attack.
Approaching another soldier nearby, Naga stabbed his sword straight through his opponent's stomach.
As one would expect, the soldier screamed in agony which didn't go unnoticed by his comrades. However, because they were scattered due to Ais throwing stones, they couldn't surround him.

Naga moved swiftly while closing the gaps between the enemies. He continued to slice at them one after another.
The soldiers were no match for him when it came to one-on-one combat.
And then, Naga started to thrust instead of slicing them.

Whenever one slices, the sword becomes dull due to the clotted blood and fat sticking to it. There was also a fear of the blade chipping in case of its contact with bones. In the worst case, the whole sword could break. During a battlefield melee, it's more efficient to thrust if taking down the head fails.
Within seconds Naga had killed 4 people.
Among the remaining 5 who rushed over to him, one of them was taken down by Ais's stone.
With that, only 4 were left.

In order not to get surrounded, Naga smartly maneuvered himself while crushing the soldiers individually.
Thrust, thrust, thrust he continued killing.

Chasing after the last one who tried to run away, Naga pierced him slightly above his abdomen from behind.
The armor which most of the soldiers wore was thin, and they didn't fully cover their bodies.
For Naga it wasn't that hard to aim for the gaps between their armors and helmets.
However, to Ais he looked like a professional.
Naga's swordsmanship was truly impressive, not only that, the level of familiarity and the way he fought with his sword looked like he lived and breathed it to Ais.

What's more, the fact that Naga walked around and finished off the enemies taken down by Ais backed up her impression of him.

At first, she thought there was no need to go to such extent, but, she quickly made up her mind. Leaving the soldiers who fainted will only result in their agony.
Despite that, being able to calmly deliver a final blow to an unconscious enemy wasn't something that one could casually do.
Ais had the feeling that Naga's appearance in combat could be his real nature.
Lifting up his sword glistening with blood, Naga approached.

"You did a good job, Ais. I was rescued by you."

"Ah, no, it wasn't anything big."

"No no, your help was crucial. It was the first time for me to witness such strength in throws. Or so, it feels that way."

"I-Is that so?"

"Your arm strength is fantastic. Not just your arms, but also your legs are robust. Rather than saying your strength is monstrous, it's super monstrous. You're amazing indeed."

Despite Ais knowing he was praising her, somehow, she was dissatisfied with the way he put it and she didn't really feel too pleased.
At that moment, Nonoeru finally arrived.

When it came to advancing toward a fort sieged by an enemy, it was much better to advance as a group. With that, they drew nearer to the fort while hiding themselves between the trees.
As soon as they reached the line between the forest and open field, they took a peek at the situation.
It seemed that the fort itself wasn't burning; nevertheless, the watchtower which was located in one corner was in flames.
And then, the enemy soldiers who had taken up positions near the forest, surrounded the fort and released a hail of arrows.
Without aiming at the fort, they continued to shoot in the sky.
Naga who wondered himself what they were targeting looked up in the direction of flying arrows, and noticed Yuki's plank floating there.
She was trying to launch an attack on the enemy from the sky. The wind gusted down from the sky, and each time it did so, screams were raised up as the enemy was blown down. At most 1-2 soldiers would be taken down with every blow.
On the other hand, around 20 soldiers were all aiming at Yuki with their arrows.

"Oi, Ais, isn't that girl flying too low? At this rate she might fall prey to those arrows."

"If she hovers too high above the ground, her magic won't reach the enemy. Even if her attack reaches by chance, it won't have enough of destructive power. That's why, she's launching her attack from that position."

"Is that so? Even if it's true, that's a little…"

Yuki was completely distracted by the constant need to avoid the arrows. Despite her needing to stay in that position, constantly dodging while simultaneously carrying out an assault from low altitudes was definitely an untenable situation.

As Naga thought this, Yuki's board began to shake violently.

"Ahh!"

Naga jerked his head up in response to Ais's muffled scream; Yuki's plank seemed to have received several hits.

(Is her magic circuit going to be hindered by the piercing arrows just like the wooden puppet?)

As if in confirmation, Yuki's plank swayed unsteadily and began to drop!

“This is bad!! If this continues she’s going to crash!!” – Ais screamed.
Naga instantly burst into action. He leapt out into the open field and bellowed.

“Yuki, this way! Land this way!”

Yuki’s eyes bulged at the sound of his violent roar.
His voice instantly attracted not only Yuki’s attention, but also that of the surrounding enemies.

“There’s somebody there!”

“Could it be an ally of witches?”

“Don’t come any closer!”

The soldiers shouted and raised their bows.

“Nonoeru!”

Ais immediately cried out.

Nonoeru grabbed a flask from around her waist, ripped out the cork, and flung water into the air.

“Water, Oh Water become a shield before me!”

As she uttered the spell, a water membrane appeared in the air above Naga in an attempt to cover him.
However, a few arrows came flying faster than the defense could form.

(I won’t make it in time!) – Ais looked on in desperation, but Naga calmly knocked the arrows down one by one.

(Amazing!)

that thought flashed through both Ais’ and Nonoeru’s minds.

Both Ais and Nonoeru opened their eyes wide.

To them, it looked like a miracle, but for Naga, knocking down flying arrows wasn’t actually that difficult. It’s a doable feat as long one had good senses and underwent a bit of training.

Even if Naga had lost his memories, he couldn’t forget the skills acquired through his training.

However, even Naga didn’t predict this outcome.

After calling out to Yuki and knocking down the arrows, he had intended to hide himself in the trees' shade.

Before he could react, he realized that a thin layer of water had started to float in front of him.

(What is this….Could it be that girl's magic?!)

Taking a glimpse at his surrounding, there was Nonoeru leaning forward from a tree's shadow, and repeatedly waving her hands in some manner.

The membrane of water blocked the next few arrows that flew towards Naga.

They pierced only halfway through before stopping suspended in the water like they were caught in a spider's web.

"What a mysterious thing. Still, this thing called magic is truly incredible."

At that time, Ais started her throwing attacks once more.

Several soldiers collapsed after being hit.

Even if her throws were off target, the clouds of dust caused by the stones sinking into a tree or into the ground made the enemy lose their composure while shooting. After witnessing her power and unexpected resistance, the soldiers started to scatter in confusion.

Deeming that it was no longer necessary to hide, Naga shouted once again at Yuki who was staggering on her plank while descending.

"This way, this way!"

Nonoeru created one more layer of water in order to protect Yuki's body.

The board continued to descend directly down above Naga's head, but it suddenly tilted and made Yuki slide completely off of it.

Naga dashed over without thinking while Nonoeru hurriedly shifted the position of the water.

Naga's hands were outstretched as he dashed to catch Yuki's body.

"Gyaa! what are you doing, let me go let me go let me goooo!"

Yuki fell into his arms and then started to strike him in his chest while screaming with a desperate, angry face.

“I-I got it, so don’t hit me. OwOwOw.”

Yuki thrust herself away from Naga as he put her down and stood on the ground.

“Ah, my board!”

Yuki tried to run over and get her board, but Naga stopped her by grabbing her wrist.

“W-What are you doing? If I don’t bring it back….”

“I’ll do it, so go hide between the trees.”

“B-But.”

“Do it quickly!”

Yuki hesitated slightly then obeyed Naga’s forceful instruction.

Nonoeru who saw Naga dashing toward the board adjusted the water membrane and moved it in front of him, above his head.

Picking up the board, Naga ran back.

“Everyone, please hide!”

At Nonoeru’s shout, Ais immediately ceased her throwing and took cover in a tree’s shadow.

Naga didn’t grasp her intention, but he nonetheless understood that she had some sort of a plan, and quickly dove inside the forest, between the trees.

“*Oh water, rise, oh water, rise. Become a spear, kill the enemy, pierce through them. Water Spear Thrusting*”

As he watched her hands gesture strangely, the water shield undulated in the air and began to split. Numerous small balls of water floated in midair and began to grow thinner and longer.

“Water, Pierce!”

The water spears burst forward.

The soldiers that had been firing at Yuki and Naga had no time to avoid and were immediately impaled.

Not even those who were hiding behind the trees were spared as they were impaled tree and all. The nearly 20 enemies were instantly reduced to 10 and were unable to continue fighting. They immediately turned tail and fled.

“Oh my, isn’t this great? You guys are indeed a big deal. I’m filled with awe.”

At Nonoeru’s terrific power, Naga unintentionally murmured his admiration.

“I guess now’s not the time for shock and awe. Oi, What’s the situation inside the fort?”

Hmph – Yuki pointedly ignored him.

“Yuki!”

Hearing Ais’ angry rebuke, her shoulders trembled.

“First, report the situation, and after that, give him your gratitude.”

“Why should I…..”

Yuki whose face became red and blue searched for an argument, nevertheless, she made up her mind in the end.

“T……The humans’ vanguard seems to have besieged the fort. They probably set the watchtower aflame by shooting it with fire arrows.”

“How many troops are there in the surroundings?”

Yuki glared at Naga. Despite that, she answered him honestly.

“On the slope there are about 50 people, whereas, below the slope, twice as many, uhmm, or there could be even triple that number.”

Provided that this is an accurate estimate, they could expect that there would be as many as 200-300 of them.

“How about Lela and the rest?”

“They’re safe I think. At least, they were safe and sound when I arrived.”

“Guess we should hurry and join them. There are only 3 of them, right? In that case, they won’t be able to hold for long. Luckily, the enemies nearby have run away, so it should be fine for them to open the gates for us. Ah, but will they be able to hear us from the inside? What’s more, I don’t know if we have the time to call out to them….”

As Naga pondered, Ais asked.

“Isn’t it better to join up with them as fast as possible?”

“Yeah, even if it means we abandon the fort without protecting it, we have to meet with them.”

“Is that so? Then, let’s storm it.”

“Ah? By storming do you mean….”

Before Naga could finish his sentence, Ais broke into a dead run.

“O-Oi, what do you intend to do, Ais?”

“I’m going to batter down the fort’s fence. Follow me!”

“What the, eehh?”

“With Ais’ enhancement power, she will be alright. Naga-san, let’s go.”

“Ah, you think so? Oh that’s right.”

Nonoeru dashed.

“Don’t slack off!”

Yuki said as she followed while holding her board.

Naga too chased after them in a hurry.

Ais charged at the fort without slowing down. Once she got near the fence, she jumped into the air and gave a sharp cry.

Ais unleashed 2 violent kicks with her right and left legs, she smashed several logs which were driven inside the ground out of the way.

(What ridiculous power. She’s indeed a human battering ram)

Naga felt astonishment, shock, and admiration as he continued to run.

Like that, Ais ran into the fort.

Following close behind, Nonoeru and Yuki tumbled inside through the broken parts.

Naga, on the other hand, bent his body low and slunk in.

Soon after they rushed into the fort, Lela, Selena, and Kei were seen dashing in their direction.

“Ais, Yuki, Nonoeru, Naga-sa-n!”

Lela who would rarely change her expression was now clearly relieved. That fact alone meant that the situation was probably hazardous. Lela breathed out a sigh of relief as she said.

“When I heard that big crash, I thought the human soldiers had broken i~n.”

“Thank God, you three were safe.”

Ais smiled with satisfaction and spread her arms.

The witch named Kei jumped into her chest and wrapped her arms around Ais’ neck. Calming her ragged breathing, Kei sighed with relief.

“**sigh**, I thought for a moment that we were finished…”

“There will be time for celebrating later. What’s the situation?”

At Naga’s commanding words and bearing, everyone focused on him.

Naga who had been thrown into a different world would usually give off a curious and pleasant aura, however, that laid back attitude was nowhere to be seen at the moment. He looked at Lela with a serious expression.

“Ah….ye-s.”

Looking at the slope behind her, she uttered.

“The enemy made an attack a while a-go. The vanguard had around 200 people climbing up the slo-pe, they continued to advance further once they realized we weren’t interfering with them. A part of their troop climbed up and deployed in the forest after confirming there was no resistance here. Surrounding the fort, the enemy began to fire arrow-s, and at the same time, an attack consisting of flaming arrows came from the side of the slope. With that, the watchtower was set a-flame a moment a-go. Now, I was trying to repel their attack using fireballs from my charms, but because it couldn’t reach the enemy in the forest, I was trouble-d.”

“Good grief. Had we come any later, it would’ve been dangerous.”

Ais heaved a big sigh of relief.

“We released a messenger pigeon immediately after spotting human troops, but you didn’t come because of that, righ-t?”

“True. We set out much earlier from the village, and while we were transporting the puppet, we noticed smoke rising up. It was then that we dashed over.”

“So it was like tha-t? Thank God we were luck-y.”

“Good, now let’s escape.” Naga said flatly.

“*Ehh?*”, Ais leaned back in shock.

“No… but, you’re telling us to abandon—“

“With the current situation, it’s impossible for us to protect this place til the end.”

“Still…”

Not just Ais but also the other witches puffed their cheeks and frowned in dissatisfaction.

Yuki, on the other hand, started to abuse Naga verbally.

“What kind of stupid, irresponsible things are you saying? As one would expect ,you are a spy from the Kasandora Kingdom aint’cha?”

“Calm down. Even if we throw away this place, it should be fine as long we seize it back.”

“What are you talking about?! Once the fort is occupied by the humans, there’s no way for us to steal it back?!”

“That’s okay, I’ve got a plan. I want to gather enemy in one spot. If we manage to do so, we will be able to repel them.”

Naga said this with complete confidence, silencing the witches.

The witches glanced at each other,

(At this point, we can only bet on Naga-san….I guess.)

Ais thought and made her decision.

“Understood. Let’s leave this to Naga-san.”

“Wait a moment, Ais, are you sure that’s fine? Should we really place our trust in this guy?”

“Even if we don’t, we won’t be able to defend this place. If we overdo it there might be casualties. In this case, it’s wiser to abandon this fort and take it back later.”

“But he might just be spouting hot air.”

“Oh, that reminds me Yuki.”

“W-What?”

“You still haven’t expressed your thanks to Naga-san for rescuing you, have you?”

“「Uuu……」”

Ais who had effectively silenced Yuki then asked,

“So, what should we do?”

Naga sharply leaned forward.

“I’d like for Lela and Yuki to do something. Specifically, I would like this…”

He explained his plan to the surrounding witches.

Gasping, the witches gaped while listening to Naga’s strategy.

After finishing his explanation, Naga looked around at their faces and asked.

“Can you do it?

Lela took a deep breath and spoke in a slightly exasperated manner.

“Count on m-e.”

However, Yuki turned her face away.

Naga sighed.

“We can only do this provided that Yuki can fly on her board.”

When she heard him say that, she grumbled.

“Well, I can do it, but…a few arrows shot through my board and damaged the magic circuit. Still, I should be able to make it fly like before once I take out the arrows.”

“Is that so? Then, that’s great.”

Naga turned his gaze around and exclaimed.

“For now, we are going to throw away this fort and enter the forest. When the enemy marches into the fort, we will commence the counterattack. Until then, let’s prepare inside the forest.”

“Understood. Okay, let’s go, everyone.”

Ais dashed out after urging everyone.

Nonoeru, Yuki, Lela, Selena, Kei followed her, with Naga taking the rear.

The seven of them slipped outside through the broken spot, and ran into the forest.

“Captain Raibaha, the messenger has arrived.”

“Bring him in.”

The captain, named Raibaha, was the leader of the attack on the witches’ fort. He let the messenger into the main camp.

The main camp was located inside a thicket, a short distance away from the slope leading to a plateau. The reason it was located here was because the tree cover would hinder any attempts to use the giant doll against them.

An attacking force consisting of a large, temporary battalion formed from 3 companies was set up.

Among many countries, there were those that adapted a military system of a platoon – 10 units, and a company – 100 units.

A force made from 5-6 individual companies was called a battalion, nevertheless, there were instances when such naming would be applied for fewer number, like 3-4 companies. In such a case, it was generally known as a “temporary battalion”. The Kasandora Kingdom was no exception to this rule, thus a temporary battalion consisting of 3 companies was formed.

Raibaha, who was a senior executive among 3 company captains, was now in charge of the temporary battalion.

The messenger stood in front of him and saluted.

“Give your statement.”

The lightly equipped man released his salute and spoke.

“Reporting sir. The witches have ceased their resistance.”

“Ceased? The previous messenger said that a part of the vanguard was destroyed as a result of a battle?”

“Yes, however, the attacks coming from the fort stopped after that.”

Hearing this, Raibaha tilted his head to one side.

(When I heard that there were casualties among the soldiers in the forest, I thought that the witches had sent reinforcements, was I wrong? Judging from their fighting methods til now, it doesn’t seem like they’re setting up a trap, but….could it be that they retreated?)

As he was contemplating the meaning behind the report, a vice adjutant from another captain’s company, named Acclaim, interjected.”

“If that’s true, then it’s a good opportunity. Let’s capture the fort at once.”

“Still, we have no orders regarding this situation. We are supposed to measure the witches’ fighting capability.”

“It won’t start unless we capture it first.”

“I guess you’ve got the point, but…”

“What’s more, by taking over the fort, it will be over. There will be no longer any need for small surveillances. Not to mention, is there any way for us to overlook such a favorable chance?! Won’t it be an opportunity to raise your rank?”

“That’s… well that’s true.”

Certainly, if Raibaha manages to take over the fort using 200 units just as Acclaim says, it will be an unexpected military gain.

“If our deed of capturing the fort is recognized, won’t the general give us a commendation?”

Swayed by Acclaim’s words, Raibaha decided.

“Fine, prepare the second group for departure. I’m relying on you, Acclaim.”

“Of course.”

“The number of the vanguard seemed to have decreased. After we assemble the remaining soldiers, we will approach the plateau and capture the fort. The 100 units from my side will go down toward the slope and stand by.”

“Please rest assured. We will scatter the witches and meet at the fort.”

Acclaim declared this with full confidence and left in high spirits along with his staff officer. Having the privilege of leading the charge and occupying the fort, Raibaha too felt inclined to be in good humor. However, he was slightly apprehensive and couldn’t be as overjoyed.

Raibaha, who had plenty of experience, was familiar with how dreadful the witches were, to the extent that it had been deeply ingrained. Nevertheless, he thought anxiously about the young Acclaim who had never fought witches before.

(Isn’t it fine for us to escape when it’s necessary? After all, the witches won’t bother pursuing us. They also won’t adopt any tactic that aims to annihilate us all at once. In the first place, they shouldn’t be able to do so because of their small numbers, still…)

Raibaha thought that it would be fine for him to come rescue the vanguard in the case that anything unexpected happened.

To begin with, his main duty wasn’t to capture a fort. Assuming that he regrouped with those who fled, that alone would be a deed worthy of raising his reputation.

Whichever option he chose, there would be no loss even if he failed.

Despite his being stuck as a mere captain of a company, Raibaha was a strong military commander who had lived through multiple wars.

The 2nd corps under the command of Acclaim held their positions near the slope. Once they regrouped with the initial vanguard, they carefully advanced halfway to the slope.

(I heard that in this vicinity there was some sort of counterattack.)

Raibaha ordered Acclaim to dispatch scouts and check the condition of the fort.

The scouting troop quickly reached the top of the slope without receiving any attacks, and sent a messenger that reported back to Acclaim

“Nobody was spotted inside the fort. It seems to be uninhabited.”

Acclaim assumed that the enemy had withdrawn.

“In that case, shall we climb up quickly and capture it?”

Acclaim ordered the 2nd group to charge.

“The enemy has retreated. We are going to occupy the witches’ fort immediately!”

The soldiers never intended to face the witches directly. Having to deal with the witches who resorted to their troublesome magic was always a disturbing notion for them. Hearing that the witches had retreated without a fight, the soldiers felt both relief and a rise in their fighting spirit.

“Ooohh!”

Feeling encouraged, the soldiers changed their formation into an oblong one and climbed up the steep slope.

In the end, the 2nd group finished climbing and stood on the plateau without receiving any resistance.

They had invaded the fort through its broken fence and unbolted the gate from the inside.

As soon as the soldiers did so, Acclaim’s troops rushed inside.

“Nobody’s here!”

“It’s empty!”

“No sign of people!”

One after another, the reports which told of the witches’ retreat were called out.

(We seized the fort without any troubles. With this, it’s just the same as receiving a gift!)

Acclaim forcefully suppressed his urge to smile wide.

“Excellent. Send a messenger to Raibaha-dono and tell him to meet us at the fort just like promised.”

“Yes!”

Raibaha, who was advancing his troops towards the foot of the slope, received the messenger dispatched by Acclaim.

“Our forces have infiltrated and captured the fort of the witches without receiving any resistance. There were no signs of witches inside.”

Hearing the report, Raibaha breathed a quiet sigh of relief.

(So the witches decided to withdraw just as we thought? Still, I didn’t expect for us to seize it this fast. Could it be that they were much weaker than we had anticipated?)

Raibaha hit upon that possibility.

Assuming that's true, it will be good news for the Kasandora Kingdom. And once they report to the general, he would probably be overjoyed.

"Great, shall we climb up the slope and enter the fort?"

Directing that to the other staff officers, he prepared the advance of the 3rd corps.

Lela was kneeling on the ground inside the forest, tearing off the charms coiled around her waist one by one and lining them up. Using her brush, she calmly wrote on them without rushing.

Yuki pulled out the arrows protruding from her board and re-adjusted the magic flow.

Kei was helping Ais pick and gather stones from around the forest.

Nonoeru's was nowhere to be seen as she was in the middle of securing a water supply nearby. Rather than collecting water from the atmosphere, it was much more efficient to collect it directly from a source.

Selena had gone out to scout the area.

Since, according to Ais, her power was inclined toward reconnaissance, Naga decided to entrust her with that task.

Naga struck a pose while he observed the witches; his back straight, his sword struck into the ground with his hands resting on the pommel.

While he was doing so, Nonoeru who had filled up her canteens with water returned.

She was carrying the canteens on her back and dangling them from her waist.

“Oh, thanks for your hard work. Ain’t these too heavy for you?”

(Isn’t he quite a considerate person?) – Nonoeru thought while raising her hand.

“I’m okay.”

“Is that so?”

Naga nodded and faced Lela’s direction.

Lela who finished writing on the numerous charms looked up at Yuki overhead.

“Naga-san, I’m don-e”

“Just in time. Once Selena returns back–“

As soon as he turned around, Selena who was dashing through the forest came into his view.

Naga welcomed her and Selena stated her report.

“A force of more than 150 people have entered the fort and there seems to be no one else following. I think there are more at the slope’s bottom.”

“The third unit of their army is located at the bottom? They’re unexpectedly cautious of us ain’t they? Speaking of which, what’s the unit at the fort doing?”

“They are located at the plaza. Some of their soldiers are looking around the inside of the fort.”

“What are the numbers of that unit?”

“I wonder if it’s not around 50.”

“Their aim is the fort, I guess. Naturally, the commander ought to be there as well”

Naga turned his head and called out to Yuki.

“You heard, didn’t you? Our target will be the current unit at the open space.”

“I got it, geez. Don’t act all high and mighty just because you’re giving orders.”

As she directed a glare at him as usual, Ais interrupted from the side.

“That’s right, Yuki. You still haven’t said your thanks to Naga-san”

“Well then, we should prepare to attack now!”

Yuki left in a rush.

Ais sighed in slight annoyance, whereas Naga smiled wryly.

Yuki jumped onto her board and floated into the air.

“Let’s do it, Lela.”

“As you wi-sh.”

Yuki used the wind to scoop up Lela’s charms that were spread all over the ground inside the forest, making them all float simultaneously in mid-air.

The wind gusted up and passed through Lela’s skirt, lifting the much reduced number of charms which acted as the hem of her skirt.

Quickly pushing the hem of her skirt down, Lela shot a look at Naga. However, he didn’t show any signs of having noticed as he stared at the floating charms.

Naga definitely looked serious, however, Lela felt that there was also a sense of excitement and joy as well..

For someone who was about to fight for their life on a battlefield, these kinds of emotions were abnormal among witches and humans alike. This being the case, she honestly felt that Naga was probably not a normal man..

While she thought that this made Naga seem quite dependable, Lela also felt that he was somehow dangerous because of it.

(I’ve got the feeling that relaxing your guard around this person is dangero-us. Still, Ane-sama has her own expectations for hi-m. I think there should be no doubt about th-at, bu-t….)

Having misgivings welling inside her, Lela thought this in secret.

Then she looked up into the sky.

All the charms lined up neatly in the air above the treetops.

Raising his eyes toward Yuki, Naga shouted.

“Bring the charms to the enemy and drop them above their heads.”

“I know what to do even without you telling me! Speaking of which, keep your filthy eyes to yourself!”

A gust of whirlwind ran directly towards Naga, nonetheless, he stopped the blow with the front of his body.

Numerous, red veins bulged on his cheeks and arms as he endured the attack. Despite this, he continued to stare at Yuki without moving an inch.

“Do what you have to do and avoid any unnecessary actions.”

Yuki stared in shock and stammered.

“I-I got it!”

As if overpowered by Naga, Yuki turned away her face away and transported the flock of charms towards the fort using her wind.

The fort would appear instantly after she got out of the forest.

Believing that the witches had fled, only a small number of soldiers were dispatched to defend the fort’s surroundings.

Yuki breathed out a sigh of relief.

It would be dangerous were she to be shot at during her work. The effectiveness of her magic might weaken at a crucial time if she used it to lift herself outside of bow range.

Yuki approached the fort as she searched for the place that had few soldiers guarding.

She looked as though she was surrounded by a flock of bluish white butterflies.

Naga and the rest moved to the forest’s border and watched attentively.

The flock of charms drew near the wooden fence at Yuki’s quick command.

Lela took out a single charm from the remaining ones near her waist, then quickly wrote on them and chanted.

“Oh, Flames, The Supreme Ruler, The apostle of untimely death. Burn and become the fire , become the silent death, come to life come to life come to life. Burn burn burn. The divine protection of the Flame Emperor and the Fire Queen.”

The charm in Lela's hand burst into flames, and the others floating in midair began to spit fire all at once.

The burning flock of butterflies, which flew above the open space, instantly froze in mid-air. Then they began to drop.

By the time the soldiers of Kasandora noticed the burning charms and Yuki it was already too late.

"What's, thaaat?"

"It's burning!"

"It's falling!"

"Witches, it's an attack from the witchesss!"

"Run away run away run away!"

The soldiers desperately tried to escape from the burning charms raining down on them, however, their large number made it difficult, not to mention the fact that the charms followed them even if they ran.

They were all wearing light equipment suited for climbing up the steep slope, because of that their uniforms easily burst into flames as they were hit by the charms.

Soldiers with body covered in flames rolled on the floor one after another, and the open space fell into chaos.

Those who dashed over after hearing noises couldn't approach as the burning charms were flying about.

Rather than being able to extinguish the flames, they themselves fell victim to the charms waiting for them.

"Damn, we were completely deceived by the witches!"

His face twisting, Acclaim cursed and ran desperately.

"Damn those witches using their dirty tricks on us. Is this how they fight?!"

Foul tactics and surprise attacks based on magic. These were attacks worthy of the witches who held the reputation of being "cowardly and spiteful creatures" that Acclaim had heard of. However, this wasn't theirs but Naga's strategy.

Seeing how their commander was turning tail, Acclaim's office staff followed him as well.

As the soldiers realized their leaders were escaping, they too broke into a run. The only passage that led to the outside was through the gate.

Acclaim cut through the group of soldiers who were flooding towards the gate, however, it turned out that that wasn't a good idea.

At the time the officers and men became a single group and tried to run outside, they were assaulted by Nonoeru's water spears and Ais' thrown stones.

The soldiers that tried to pass through the gate were concentrated in one place. Because of that, the spears and throwing stones would hit them even if they weren't aimed properly.

Acclaim was pierced violently by the water spears, he vomited blood and fainted on the spot.

"Guu…..damned witches….damned—guaaah"

Acclaim's fallen body was tread on and kicked hard by the officers and men who were fleeing. Having already received serious injuries that pushed him to the verge of death, Acclaim was finally killed by the stomping feet of his own allies.

Nevertheless, many of them would encounter the same fate as Acclaim.

The soldiers were bombarded by spears and stones as they screamed and fell in complete chaos.

The soldiers who fell down became an obstacle that hindered the next ones. And those who tried to avoid it by slowing down their speed became easier targets for the spears and stones. As a result of this, the number of fallen soldiers had increased and made the obstacle grow. It made it nearly impossible to for anyone to pass.

Those who occasionally managed to get out were knocked down by Ais and Nonoeru the moment they tried to pass through the gate. It was a disastrous scene with heaps of corpses all around.

Other soldiers realized there was still a broken part in the fence and took a roundabout path.

Neither Ais nor Nonoeru could attack that place from their position.

Naga deemed it was necessary to allow some survivors in order to let them report about their utter defeat. Therefore, he deliberately overlooked them.

Not even a quarter of the day had passed since the soldiers of Kasandora had successfully seized the fort.

“We did it! They’re running away they’re running away! The enemy soldiers are retreating!”

Selena and Kei were jumping up while shouting with joy.

Ais had stopped throwing stones and was huffing and puffing heavily. As one would expect, even Ais couldn’t hide her fatigue after her consecutive, full power throws.

Nonoeru too released her power after taking a deep breath.

The six of them came out from the forest to the open field in front of the fort.

Yuki who was controlling the charms from her board returned as well. Unlike before, this time her board didn’t sustain even a single arrow from the enemy.

“Oi, Yuki!”

“I told you not to call me casually like that!”

At the protest coming from overhead, Naga smiled with a broad grin. Selena and Kei shuddered unintentionally at impact coming from that twisted smile.

Somehow, his look and impression is different in comparison to how they first saw him – is what both of them truly thought.

“Oooi, *Yuki~sama*. Won’t you pretty pwease come down?”

Said Naga in a sickeningly sweet manner as he waved at her enthusiastically.

“Wh-what is it? Why are you calling me in such a disgusting way? You’re going to give me hives if you speak like that.”

Making a cautious face, Yuki descended.

“Good job, still, won’t you continue to look around the fort’s surroundings from the sky? Especially, from the side of the cliff. Since we were unable to make use of the watchtower, observing the enemy movements can only be assigned to you.”

“Ah, th-that’s right. Well, that’s obvious. Speaking of which, I’d do it even without having you tell me.”

Saying that over her shoulder, she ascended with her board and looked down at Naga.

Yuki thought that Naga would look up and try to scold her, but contrary to her expectations, his sight was directed towards the horizon. And then, he glared at something with a serious face.

(What's he looking at, that guy….)

Nothing could be seen in that direction. From Yuki's position, there was the steep slope connecting the upper cliff, but generally, only the fort's wooden fence and the sky stretching overhead could be seen from the ground.

Did Naga notice an abnormal change in the situation? Or perhaps, his eyes were fixed on something that others couldn't see? Yuki couldn't tell.

(Well, as long he doesn't look this way, it's fine. Still…)

Riding skillfully on her board, Yuki slowly began to circle in the sky above the fort.

Naga drew his sword from the scabbard.

"What do you plan to do, Naga-san?"

"Hn" – Being asked by Ais, Naga sniffed his nose.

"I'm going to finish off those that are in agony. The soldiers that sustained injuries from Nonoeru's and your attack can be no longer saved. That's why, rather than prolonging their suffering, it's better to ease their death."

"……."

"Or perhaps, you want the humans to continue suffering?"

"No. Certainly, witches and humans aren't beings that get along, but I don't think we would wish for the fallen enemy to die in agony."

"Hearing that from you, I feel relieved."

Naga said with a grin.

"Wait over there."

Leaving these words behind, he stepped towards the gate.

Ais called out to Naga's back with a troubled voice.

"I as well….I'll help you as well."

"Are you okay with that, Ais? It's quite a harsh task you know?"

"I will be alright" – Ais nodded with a stiff face and turned around to the other witches.

“Kei, Selena, Nonoeru, Lela, you guys wait over there.”

The four of them gulped down their saliva and nodded.

Naga stepped up to the pile of fallen soldiers near the gate and checked their conditions one by one.

“If there are lightly injured people, sort them out, Ais.”

“Ah, yes.”

“Even though I said so, those who sustained light injuries have probably managed to flee, so it’s unlike for any of them to be here, I guess.”

As soon as Naga spotted a person on a verge of death and moaning, he alleviated their misery by piercing his sword through that person’s throat.

After checking the state of those surviving and drawing a conclusion, Ais snapped their necks resolutely.

Lela and the rest observed those two in astonishment.

Naga, whose appearance seemed cruel, was actually, a sincere, or rather a kind person.

This being the case, it should have been incredibly harsh for him to deliver finishing blows to people who were still alive. In fact, it made Ais contort her face in unhappiness. However, Naga continued to carry out his work nonchalantly and calmly.

(How should I evaluate him?) – Lela couldn’t understand it herself.

In the end, there were no lightly injured people. The majority of soldiers died in the battle, and even those who survived would incur illnesses to the extent that it was hopeless. Finishing their job, Naga and Ais called to Lela and the rest who were sticking out their heads from the broken fence inside the fort.

Naga threw a question at Lela.

“There’s no way for me alone to dig a hole big enough to bury those dead people. Perhaps, it’s better to burn them. We can also leave them like that to rot, but there might be chance for this to cause a plague. Shall we burn them?”

“That should probably d-o.”

“Well, it’s fine to leave it for later. Let’s discuss the situation from now on.”

Saying so, he beckoned the 5 witches with his hand.

The 6 of them formed a circle and sat in a clearing inside the fort.

“Despite everything, it was a splendid tactic, Naga-san.”

Ais whose face was still a bit pale said so.

“No, it wasn’t particularly splendid or anything like that. Rather, it’s strange that you haven’t done that much til now.”

“*sound of astonishment*…..”

At least it seemed to be something that Harrigan could come up with, nevertheless, Naga tilted his head downwards.

(Could it be that she won’t come up with a sneaky tactic like this one because she holds a lot of confidence in manipulating the doll?) – is what he guessed.

This was something that the enemy forces might believe.

No matter how strong the witches are, Naga couldn’t believe that the humans had been so far unable to overthrow this fort guarded by only a few people.

(Perhaps, in this world people resort to nothing but foolishly honest fighting styles. Even though those aren’t the way to win a battle… however well both sides can grasp each other’s strong and weak points is the way to victory, and defeat leads to huge losses. Outwitting the enemy and striking their weak points with one’s strong points is the key to success.)

Thinking so, Naga muttered without realizing.

“According to Sun Tzu, when you must resort to deceptive methods, your enemy’s temperament is your greatest resource….”

Hearing Naga murmuring, Ais bent her neck.

“The person named Sun Tzu, who’s that? What are deceptive methods?”

” Hm? No….uuumm… who’s that again? The name somehow appeared inside my head just now, but…deceptive methods are simply ways in which both sides trick each other.”

(Were they unable to grasp the meaning behind his words?) Not just Ais but also Lela, Nonoeru, Kei, and Selena tilted their heads.

“More importantly, Ais.”

Being called by Naga’s solid and confident voice, Ais straightened her spine.

“You said before about sending a homing pigeon, but when will it arrive at Harrigan?”

“That’s right” – at his question, Ais bent her neck and returned back to her normal self after thinking hard.

“Since we got rid of the human army immediately after discovering them, they should be on their way right now. The time Ane-sama and the rest take to arrive will depend on the length of their preparations and the number of people they bring, but, they should be here at the earliest around midday, and at the latest, around sunset….Still, with the current situation, provided that Ane-sama and the rest dash over here unarmed, they should probably arrive by the afternoon.”

“So what we are going to do will be decided upon her arrival?

“Yes, once we report to her the details and seek her decision, it will come to that.”

“Is that so? Then, shall we hang on inside this fort until Harrigan comes?”

“Do you think that the enemy will strike again?”

Ais asked as if probing for Naga’s opinion, she herself was aware that she was depending on him in these circumstances.

Was it due to her being impressed by his brilliant defeat of the advancing enemy? Or perhaps, by his courage and calmness during a critical situation? Or maybe, she was amazed by his shrewdness when he effectively led the witches? Ais herself couldn’t tell, however, she had a strange feeling that by having Naga they would be able to resolve their problems.

“No, the enemy probably won’t come back after going through such a bitter experience. At least, they should think that way….considering their current numbers. When it comes to it, they will either gather more people or think up another strategy. Whichever it is, it will be a matter for later. By the way…”

Looking at the direction of the forest, Naga continued to speak.

“What do you plan to do with the puppet left inside the forest?”

“I was thinking about bringing it here since there’s only one remaining in the fort. As expected, it would be hard for me to carry it by myself. Not to mention, taking Yuki with me is probably out of question.”

“Oh. You mean we have to observe the enemy’s movements depending on her eyes, right? After all, the watchtower has burned up completely. I guess, it will be already too dark if we go and bring it here now.”

“That’s right. Well then, til Ane-sama and the rest arrive, we should reinforce the fence while paying attention for any signs of enemies…..”

“No” – Naga shook his head.

“That will not be necessary. If by any chance the enemy makes another attack, we won’t be able to protect this fort til the end with our meager number. What’s more, that plan won’t work a second time. That’s why, any repair will be meaningless, still, it’s fine to check our damage. More importantly, everyone is probably tired, so it’s better for you to rest your bodies.”

“I wonder about that…”

“That way, you will be able to work when it’s important. You might feel anxious from doing nothing, but do your best in resting as well.”

Ais chuckled.

“You mean… we should try our best to recover as much as possible?”
“That’s what I mean. Like by sitting here or drinking water. With that much, you should be able to recover to some extent. Even your magic isn’t inexhaustible, right?”

(As one would expect, he can even deduce that?)

“Yes” – Ais, who nodded, looked around at the faces of the other witches in turn.
“There’s no way for all of us rest at once, so let’s take turns.”
“Then, Ais and Nonoeru should be firs-t, then us late-r.”
“In that case I’ll accept your offer. How about Naga-san?”
“Me? I…that’s right, should I also take a rest and so I can be prepared when the time comes?”
“There’s a building over there. You can lie down on a mattress inside.”

Taking along Naga and Nonoeru, Ais headed towards the house building. Meanwhile, Lela, Selena, and Kei split in order to tidy up after the battle and check the damage to the fort.

Raibaha, who was preparing his troop to climb the slope, noticed screams coming from above.
“What’s happened?” – As he looked up, he saw a small number of his allies tripping over themselves in an effort to escape.

Raibaha, who was a commander with lots of experience, quickly drew the conclusion that the vanguard unit had taken flight after being assaulted by the witches.
He didn’t know their methods, nor the reason why it had happened, but he did know that now was not the time to think about it.
“It’s probably an attack from the witches. Prepare for contact with the enemy! As soon as you have covered these men’s retreat, quickly withdraw down to headquarters!”

Raibaha's troops stood there momentarily, then proceeded to shelter the defeated remnants. After which, they systematically retreated.

Following their withdrawal to headquarters, Raibaha questioned the defeated soldiers.

Upon that, he learned about Acclaim's troops entering the uninhabited fort, being raided by the witches in their down time, and falling apart while being targeted at the moment of retreat.

(This way of fighting is unusual for the witches)

Raibaha was a bit concerned; nevertheless, what worried him more was the disappearance of Acclaim from amongst the fleeing soldiers.

"Speaking of which, what about Acclaim?"

Not one amongst the soldiers could answer him.

(That guy, could it be that he died in the battle?)

Thinking so, Raibaha looked up into the sky.

Rather than being praised by the general, he would likely be held responsible for this.

(Guess, nothing good comes from getting involved with witches)

Sighing, Raibaha spoke towards an adjutant.

"Oi, go back to Ein fort."

Circling around the 3rd fort several times and confirming the absence of soldiers, Yuki decided to fly a little distance away from the plain. As this wasn't the first time she patrolled this vicinity, she could visualize its topography inside her head. However, it was the first time for her to fly in daylight, as before she would do it during daybreak or in the evening, when it was difficult to be spotted.
Looking below, a reddish-brown wasteland unfolded before her. Once it was seen during daylight, the land's topography would become much clearer.
This wasteland would continue to stretch on until the fertile lands of humans that wouldn't be seen unless one went further. Because of that, there were no cities, not to mention villages, around. The reason why the human army advanced up to this place was due to witches inhabiting the black forest.
The humans wanted to take the land from the witches and drive them away from their surroundings.

The current king of Kasandora that borders near the territory of the Harrigan clan is Kasandora the III. His predecessors weren't enthusiastic about setting their feet in the

black forest.
Rather than that, they would be constantly involved in disputes with various other countries, therefore, one could say they had no spare time for planning any conquest.
However, recently, the situation had changed.

Following the conflict between the Old Church the New Church temporary settling down, the disputes among various countries and Kasandora came to an end as well.
The God's children, newly dispatched to Kassandora from the Old Church, notionally understood as beings close to reverend fathers and pastors, were extremely vehement about the extermination of the witches and seemed to be trying to incite Kassandora III.

Yuki had learned that much from Harrigan's explanations. Still, she was unable to comprehend the reason behind the Old Church's zealousness for the extermination of witches or its desire to expel them.
The witches didn't attack the human's side nor cause them any problems, they were just leading a secluded life inside the black forest. Despite that, why are they being assaulted by humans? Why do they have to be chased away by humans? Not being able to understand at all, she became furious at this absurdity.

Yuki had known of Harrigan's recent headache caused by the Kingdom's army, which made her detest those that troubled her beloved sister more and more.

(If only I had more power, I'd murder the entire human army.)

While floating in the air on her board, Yuki felt a burning impatience and irritation.
Even now, it was no different.
They had luckily made it in time, but had Naga and the rest been arrived later, the fort could've been burned together with Lela, Kei, and Selena stationed inside. Yuki bit her lips in frustration, but was still relieved that her comrades had been kept safe.

(But….this guy….)

Whenever she thought about how it was thanks to the oddly dressed man, named Naga, that they were able to repel the advancing enemy, she felt great displeasure.
The time when she had to make an emergency landing, and even the moment when she displayed her helplessness while being rescued by him, Yuki was bitter about both.

(He's vulgar, stupid, and lecherous. Well, I'll admit that he has good ideas, still, in the first place, he's a man whose past and origin is unknown. Not to mention, he might be a spy sent by those humans and just pretending to have lost his memories.)

Harrigan, who was a sharp person, should also have considered this. Nevertheless, she had a policy of resolutely dealing with a risk upon acknowledging it. It could also be that she was feigning ignorance. Despite that, is it really fine to place such a risky bet? – Yuki felt uneasy.

(That guy, I have to properly keep an eye on him. But, I also have to prioritize monitoring the human army, still….)

Below her, there was a fort established by humans passing through a small mountain range. It was Ein fort. Unlike the witches' fort, It was mostly defensive walls intended to repel attackers. The humans would always station as many as 300 soldiers inside of it in order to exercise their influence over a single zone in this vicinity.

The fort's function was to observe the witches' attitude and hold them back in case they decide to descend from the forest into the plain. And then, inform the nearby fort and the kingdom about their intentions by sending a messenger.

(Even though we haven't done anything.)

At least, Harrigan had no plans of leaving the forest. Yuki also followed that policy. After all, what the witches desired for was to live peacefully inside the forest. Nothing more and nothing less.

Won't the humans even tolerate that modest wish? If they won't, there's probably nothing that can stop their aggression. Rather, perhaps it will become more and more violent.

For Yuki, it was incomprehensible.
(Well, if even Ane-sama can't come up with a solution, then it's all the more reason for me not to. I'll do everything in my power….. I guess. For the time being, let's focus on the scouting, which I was entrusted with. I might be shot down with arrows if I fly too close to the fort, so I better be careful.)

As she passed through the mountain range, Yuki further increased her altitude.
The wind flow carrying her board was a bit unbalanced.
Paying attention to her wind control, she flew up while maintaining a higher altitude than usual.

If she flies to a higher altitude, the magic will run out faster, however?, it should still be fine as long the round-trip is a distance similar to that between theirs and the enemy's fort.

Finally, the sight of the human's fort jumped into Yuki's view.
The closer she approached it, the higher the risk of running into the guarding soldiers.
While paying more attention to that, Yuki continued to get closer to the fort. And then, as if doubting her eyes, she screamed without realizing.

"What's, that?! What is this?!"

The inside of the fort was overflowing with people.

Near the fort there were several hundred tents.
Furthermore, lines of horses were drawing near the fort.

Yuki couldn't be sure of the details because of the distance, but there was no doubt that around a thousand soldiers were present there. Furthermore, more troops continued to arrive.
Yuki felt an icy chill run through her body.
When it comes to this number of soldiers, only one idea can pass through one's mind. That the military of the Kasandora Kingdom was seriously attempting the capture of the witches' fort.
(This is serious. I need to report this to Hari-nee quickly!)

Having a pale face, she controlled the wind and changed the course of her board.
Because she didn't encounter any soldiers so far, Yuki judged it was fine to fly at full speed.
Once she lowered her height, she flew away as fast as she could.

Yuki returned back and reported her findings while yelling loudly. Since there were only 7 people inside, the loud yelling was probably unnecessary.

The seven of them, who sat in a circle on folding stools, held a conference for a countermeasure inside the fort's housing.

Some of the witches leaned forward with a pallid faces.

"What should we do, Ais?"

Nonoeru asked.

"Assuming we are attacked by many thousands of enemy soldiers, not even Ane-sama's dolls can….."

Selena, who was at loss for words, made a face that showed she wanted to cry.

"Talking this and that, I think there's no other option than to abandon this fort, but am I wrong?"

Saying so, Kei looked around at the faces of her comrades.

Not even Ais knew what to do. She turned towards Yuki, who sat next to her.

"Yuki, their forces were still in the middle of amassing….. right?"
"Yes that's right. I think about a thousand soldiers were present at the time I saw them, still, their number is likely to increase."
"Which means that they're not going to attack us soon. As you might expect, we have to discuss and decide on this once Ane-sama arrives."

Yuki, Nonoeru, Lela, and Kei could do nothing but nod silently.
Ais shifted her eyes towards Naga to her left.
She wanted for him to say something, wanted for him to say words which could reassure

them.
“Naga-san, what do you think?”

Yuki, that sat to Ais’ right, puffed her cheeks in discontent, but nevertheless, Naga was a vital character, and he stared up into the sky and gave a reply.

“Hm, that’s right, I’m of the same opinion about them not attacking soon. As you would predict, it has to be decided upon Harrigan’s arrival.”
“….Is that so?”

Covering up her discouragement, Ais replied.

“More importantly, Ais. I’d like to take a glimpse inside the warehouse, but is that fine?”
“Y-Yes, that’s okay. Still, what are you looking for?”
“Nothing in particular, I just want to check if there’s anything that could become useful.”

(I wonder what he intends to do)

Before Ais could ask, Naga stood up quickly.

“Well then, I’ll go and see inside the warehouse. Is the door open? Or perhaps, you need a key?”

Lela lifted her right hand.

“In that case, I’ll guide yo-u.”

Being led by Lela, they left the room at a brisk pace.

“So good…. the unpleasant smell of a man is gone and it’s clean now…”
Being pleased, Yuki said such things, however, Ais was a bit dejected.

(To what extent are we going to be at our wits’ end from now on? How much danger will we be facing? I wonder if we can have him understand that. Perhaps….it’s unreasonable for an outsider to share our sense of danger.)

But, Ais had the feeling that Naga could figure out something. That’s because he gave out the aura of being able to find a breakthrough solution. Despite that, no tension was sensed from his words and conduct now.

“Speaking of which, Ais, what do you plan to do for the time being? I’m, thinking about setting out for scouting again.”
“I wonder about that. No… Ane-sama should be arriving soon, and we might be assigned to new duties by her instructions, so Yuki, too, should stay here. Just like Naga-san said, the chances for the human army to strike a second time are probably low for the time being.”

Each time Ais pronounced his name, Yuki's face became displeased.

"Somehow, it feels like we can't rely on what that guy says."

Even though Yuki resisted, she acknowledged his explanations inside her heart.

(W-Well, still, that's just common sense. It's not like that guy possesses a discerning eye)

"By the way, Yuki. You've been constantly working by supporting the cart, scouting the human troops, and assaulting them. It's better if you take a short rest. As soon as the day breaks, we will have you fly again."
"I guess… so. Understood."
"Even if the enemy isn't going to charge for a second time, there's still the fear that a small amount of them might draw near. By the time Lela comes back, we will put back the barrier[play on words], and then await for Ane-sama's arrival. Nonoeru, Selena, you've been doing a good job, but I'd like for you to work once more."

The three of them, whose faces were shaded with visible anxiety, nodded.

As there were no particularly notable things in the warehouse, Naga and Lela returned back shortly.

Without speaking to Naga, whose long face showed a feeling contrary to his expectation, Ais called out to Lela.

"Yes, Ai-s?"
"I was thinking about putting up the barrier again. Won't you help us? Rather, your barriers are the most efficient ones among ours, so I should be asking you to let us assist."

Without a moment of hesitation, Naga asked.

"Barrier… what's that, Ais?"

"That's right, if I were to put it simply, it's something placed using the blood of the witches against any attempt of enemy search, or you could call it an anti-detection device against humans? More or less like that."
"Ah, Harrigan was talking about it. I don't quite understand it, but I get it."
"Which one?"
"I have no idea about that thing called "barrier"(1), but I've heard of a barrier. I can somehow grasp your concept of barriers thanks to the similarity. So in the end, whenever you put that thing around, the enemy soldiers won't be able to spot you, even if they get lost in the darkness and approach you, right?"
"Yes, you can consider it that way."
"You've created some convenient things there, haven't you? I'm jealous."

At Naga, who honestly said that, Ais and the rest of the members made a suspicious face.

“Jealous…. you mean, of this power?”
“That’s because it’s convenient, isn’t it? Or perhaps, there’s some sort of a risky condition in exchange for putting up the barrier?”
“No, regarding that, we only apply a bit of our blood, energy, and mana. Apart from that, there’s no danger whatsoever.”
“Then, is that not a handy thing?”
“Doesn’t it give you the creeps? Or maybe….. frightens you? After all, we hold abilities that are considered abnormal by humans.”
“Don’t say weird things. People who have powers are much more useful than ordinary ones. Being able to run faster than normal people or having inhuman strength are probably convenient things. Having powers doesn’t make you any different. In the end, you’re just people who can use them.”
sigh of astonishment

Ais was taken aback.

(It’s the first time for someone to react like this. I mean, seeing us like normal people. How can he think of us that way? As one might expect, is it because he isn’t someone from this world? I wonder…)

Not minding Ais’ puzzlement, Naga continued to speak.

“If someone who holds power hits another, he will become a threat. If someone who has swordsmanship hit another with a sword, he will become a threat. And if someone who’s stupid leads an army, he will become a threat as well. Whatever ability you hold, it doesn’t matter.
A person will become of use or a threat to others depending on how he manages his power. That’s why, just because yours are extraordinary abilities, I won’t think of it as scary or repulsive. What’s more, you rescued someone like me, whose origin was doubtful.”
“Naga…..-san.”

Ais’ eyes, which were gazing at Naga, became somewhat moistened. She was a bit moved by his words.
Lela, too, watched him with a face filled with admiration. Nonoeru, Selena, and Kei had strange, yet amazed, expressions as well.
Naga suddenly felt uncomfortable.

(What, what’s wrong with those guys’ reaction? Even though I said something obvious, they got this emotional?)

Naga still couldn’t grasp what the outside of this world looked like. The inhabitants of this world would consider his eccentric way of thinking as peculiar and unique.
Should the humans call themselves and the witches as separate beings? Assuming they do, the witches would be considered as evil beings that try to invade the humans’ territory. For them, the witches weren’t “just peculiar beings with unique abilities”. The witches were, after all, witches, and could only be perceived as “the nemesis of humans”.

Continuing to fight with the humans ruled by that common sense and being chased away by them, for Ais and the rest, Naga's words were a fresh, strange, and pleasant experience.

"More importantly, Ais. It's probably better to set up that barrier as fast as possible. After all, it requires a certain amount of time, right? There's no telling when the enemy's scouting troop will come."

Being urged by Naga, Ais came back to her senses.

"Ah…. that's right."

She replied with a radiant smile appearing on her face.

"Let's hasten ourselves in placing the barrier and wait for Nee-sama's arrival."

Naga looked around the room.

"How about Yuki?"
"That girl, she's resting in a separate room because she had constantly been working today."
"Then that means that she's not going to help with setting up the barrier, right? If that's the case, is it fine for me to tag along?"
"Eh?"
"That's because I've never seen it before. I want to see it with my own eyes. I thought about restraining myself were that girl to be present, but… if she isn't coming… then…"

(What's more, he's unexpectedly a kind person, isn't he?)

Once Ais murmured inside her heart, she smiled and faced toward Lela and the rest.

"Everyone, are you okay with Naga-san watching?"

(E-h? Doesn't it feel like Ais' smile is a bit different from the usua-l?)
While feeling a little confused, Lela nodded in affirmation.

"I don't mind, bu-t…"
Nonoeru, Selena, and Kei, also nodded.

"Well then, shall we go? Selena and Kei will remain here and stand watch. If Yuki wakes up only to find nobody around, it will be troublesome. The same applies for Nee-sama's arrival. Now that Yuki is taking a rest, can I have you watch from the side of the cliff?"
Selena, who appeared to be the youngest among them, replied while stiffening up.
"Yes, Ais. I'll do the care-taking."

As for Kei,
"Yeah, got it. If anything happens, we will immediately give a smoke signal."
She answered lazily.

Like that, Naga departed with the rest to the outside of the fort, so as to place a barrier.

After about half an hour, Ais and the rest had finished placing the barrier and returned to the fort.
There, Harrigan and several other girls were waiting.

Even though the room was said to be the biggest among the rest in the house building, it's wooden floor and walls weren't even furnished with decorations. However, all of the members could gather inside.
Having already heard from Selena and Kei, who were taking care of the place, Harrigan also received a detailed report from Ais and agreed with Naga's opinion of not having to be vigilant about the enemy's next onslaught.
Furthermore, Lela and the rest had just mentioned about putting up a barrier. Even if the enemy's scouts get lost in the darkness after the end of the day and planned to approach the fort in secret, they would almost certainly be detected.
With that, Harrigan assembled all the members in order to discuss the plan going forward.
Not just Selena and Kei, but also Naga, Ais, Yuki, and Nonoeru hadn't eaten anything since the morning. Because of that, Harrigan ordered them to bring the emergency food from the storehouse, and they tried to talk while lightly eating.

Following Harrigan, the witches sat in a circle on the folding stools, with a small, folded table placed in front of them. There were wooden plates with dried bread and dried meat lined up on it.
The complete list of attendance consisted of:
Ais, Yuki, and Nonoeru, who had carried the wooden doll.
Lela, Selena, and Kei, who had been stationed at the fort.
Dee, Cu, the Rinne and Rinna sisters, Eleonoza, and Mimone, who had been brought by Harrigan.

Adding Harrigan and Naga, there was a total number of 14 people present.

Naga looked out over the girls who were sitting in a circle

Naga didn't know whether or not there could be some other witches dispatched inside the fort, however, even if he was to add that, there would probably be, at most, 20 people. With that number, they were going to fight the human army. What's more, all the members were young witches.
Naga, once again, felt astonishment, admiration, and sympathy.
The witches, who fearlessly stood against the imminent and strong enemy, were held in high regards by him.
It wasn't just because of them giving him a hand. He felt sympathy toward their way of life and how they appeared, he felt that he would like to become their strength.

Naga wouldn't admire those who were stingy and only lived for the sake of survival, he would give them no respect at all.
Not giving up despite how powerful the enemy is, and not refusing to fight. Those were his principles and position, or one could say, his way of living.
For the sake of Harrigan and the rest, who wouldn't give up no matter how hard a fight was nor how much they were chased away, Naga decided to display the utmost of his ability.
Before the start of discussion, Harrigan faced toward Naga, who sat next to her.

"Naga-dono."
"What, why are you so formal?"

Lifting herself off of the folding stool, she kneeled down on one knee before Naga. Yuki, who was next to her, frowned angrily with a displeased face.

"However much I say it, the words can't express my thanks for what you did, but at least let me convey my gratitude."

At that moment, Harrigan stated these words and bowed down deeply.

"I'm thankful to you for saving my daughters."
"I didn't do anything big. Actually, the ones who made a great effort were Lela Yuki, Ais, Nonoeru, Kei, and Selena. Before paying me gratitude, you should probably praise them first."

"Eh?" – Yuki's expression shifted suddenly.

Raising her face, Harrigan gazed at Naga in front of her eyes and continued to speak.
"Those girls are persons related to these matters. It's only natural for them to fight for themselves. However, it's different in your case. You arrived from a different world, in other words, you're an outsider. There's no reason for you to fight for us. For you, who is in such a position, to lend us your wisdom and to rescue us from distress, isn't expressing our gratitude an obvious thing?"

"Ah that's why, it's…. right, that's my thanks for having you rescue me. I probably mentioned it before, didn't I? About me certainly repaying your favor for a night's lodging and a meal. This would be equivalent to repaying that favor. Even if you consider yourself to be saved by me, there's no need for you to say thanks. It should be fine as long you accept it as something natural."

Yuki suddenly stood up.
"That's right. Repaying one's received favor is an obvious thing. Still, you're far from repaying it! That's why, work for us from now on."
"Oi, Yuki, what are you….."

Harrigan glared at Yuki as if trying to scold her, but, despite Yuki slightly averting her eyes from Naga, Harrigan couldn't sense any malicious intentions coming from her. She swallowed her words of reprimand.

"I-If you do so, we won't abandon you, instead, we are going to raise you properly. Also, about the time when you saved me…. th-thank you."

Yuki said this and quickly sat back down and faced in another direction. Somehow, her cheeks seemed to be flushed. Was it due to the embarrassment caused by expressing her gratitude to a man? Or perhaps……
Be that as it may, Harrigan was surprised and greatly pleased. That's because Yuki, who used to detest men, tried to acknowledge Naga's presence.

(Somehow, it feels like a wind of change has come. I can't tell whether or not it will blow in the right direction, but at least, there's a sign of something starting to shift. If it goes well, we may be even able to change this desperate situation.)

Harrigan's heart fluttered silently at such expectation.

"Oh, that's right."

Being thanked, Naga gave a broad smile.

"Indeed, I can't completely repay your debt at once. Therefore, I'll be repaying it diligently from now on. Are you fine with that, Yuki?"
Yuki replied while desperately avoiding eye contact with him.

"I-it's not like it's not alright"

(Heh? So that girl also has a cute side.)

Thinking so, Naga turned around to Harrigan.

"That's why I'm telling you Harrigan, you don't have to bow down like that in front of me."

Naga reached out his hand toward Harrigan who was kneeling down on one knee.

"Hey, please stand up."

Gently taking her hand, Naga pulled her up from the floor.

"Furthermore, there's no need to call me by "dono". It's fine to call me "Naga" just like you always do."

After he released her hand, Harrigan replied with a smile on her face.

“Then, shall I allow myself to do so?”

It was neither a sarcastic nor a self-mocking smile. Right now, she was displaying a gentle smile, which she had never shown before.

Standing up, Harrigan reseated herself on the folded stool.

“Well, Harrigan, there’s one proposal coming from me who wishes to repay my debt, but will you hear it?”
“Of course. Ask? however much you want.”
“Ah, no. Before that, first, I’d like to confirm this place’s topography.”
Naga looked at Yuki.

“W-What? You still have something you want to say?”

“Rather than wanting to say, I’d like to check something, but, you can see the terrain of the enemy’s fort from the above, can’t you?”
“T-That’s right, I can. What about it?”
“Are you able to draw a map?”
“Eh? A map?”
“Yeah, a simple one that will allow me to broadly grasp the land’s shape and the distance should do.”
“I….I will try to draw it.”

Once she nodded with a vague expression, Naga requested Lela to bring her a paper and a pen.
Unfortunately, because there was no spare paper inside the fort, she came and brought a parchment instead.
Recalling her own memory, Yuki drew with the pen on the parchment.
And shortly after that, she finished a simple drawing of a map.

“Heh? Ain’t you quite skillful there?”
“O-Of course!”
“I see. So there’s a wasteland between the mountains and the river….? It seems like we can do something with this.”

Naga, who nodded, leant his body forward and pointed out at the map.

“Yuki, the enemy’s fort, how long do you think will it take for the enemy’s force to march the distance between Ein fort and this cliff?”

“Ah…. ehm….”

Yuki desperately began to estimate the distance it took to fly there.

“Probably one day if they’re running fast on their feet. I wonder if they wouldn’t reach it by evening were they to set out in the early morning. And if they walk slowly, perhaps they would reach the next day, but…”

(Hm? It feels like she’s not awfully confident in her answer)

As soon as he looked at her with astonishment surfacing on his face, Yuki’s face was dyed red and it seemed as if steam was about to explode out the top of her head.

“I-I-I-Is there anything you want to say? If so, say it without that grin on your face. It gives me a bad feeling!”
“I’m not, I’m not.”

Waving his hands, Naga turned his face to Harrigan.

“As for me, I don’t really understand this world’s power structure or the overall perspective of the territory under your control. That’s why, I’d like to confirm some things.”

Naga, who said these words, looked around at all present. At the sharp glint in his eye, several witches straightened up without realizing.

“Letting the humans snatch away this fort will be bad, right?”
Harrigan nodded with a grave seriousness.

“Yes. If we are pushed away from this place, we won’t be able to prevent the soldiers of the Kasandora Kingdom from penetrating the black forest. It will mean the same as us being unable to remain inside of it.”
“Is that so? In that case, so as to protect this place, let’s go out and defeat them.”

(H-how blunt!?)

Not just Harrigan, but also the witches all around stared at Naga in astonishment.

Finally breaking the silence, Harrigan gasped.

“Going out and defeat them, is what you say? Are you serious about that?”
“I am. In order to protect the inside, you have to win outside. I think it’s quite an obvious thing.”
“You…. surely have a plan, right?”

Naga responded definitively and calmly to Harrigan, whose face was filled with confusion, doubt, and hope.

“Obviously I have a plan. If you leave the leadership to me, I can and will defeat the army of Kasandora so thoroughly that they won’t want to approach this place ever again. How about that?”

“Leave the leadership to you…..?”
“That’s right.”

Naga replied seeming neither flustered nor boastful.
Harrigan shot a glimpse at Yuki.
Even though she would usually raise an objection or express her disapproval in loud and abusive words, it appeared that she was at a loss at Naga’s impudent suggestion.

“Would you mind if we make the decision after…..we hear you plan?”
“Yes, I don’t mind.”
“Well then, let’s hear it.”

Epilogue

“Oh my, who do we have here, if it isn’t the District Head. Welcome and thank you for your attendance.”

Inside a certain royal palace, in the capital of the Kasandora Kingdom, a king, who appeared to be in his latter thirties, waved his long, luxurious, silk-made garments and respectfully welcomed his visitor.

Besides the capital, Kasandora kingdom ruled over three other fortified cities together with some small settlements. It was a relatively powerful country with a large population in a remote region.

This person, whom the current king of Kasandora, Kasandora III, praised and deprecated himself before, was a cardinal sent by the Old Church, a man named Aiba.

Aiba, who was thin, tall, and wrapped in a white robe, was unexpectedly young, and looked to be in his latter twenties. The fact that he was assigned as a district head at this young age was proof of him being a sharp and capable person.

“No no, please don’t mind it, your Majesty.”

Smiling weakly, the Cardinal, Aiba, returned his greeting.
Behind him, 10 people, who were assigned as his guardians, were lined up. They were all members of the sacred knights. Those knights didn’t try to take off their helmets in front of Kasandora, as they would only show their bare faces to a priest from the Old Church, in other words, towards God’s children.

“Please, sit down.”

Kasandora reached the seat of honor at the long table placed in the dining hall and recommended Aiba to take his seat.
Seeing Aiba taking his place on the leather-made, black chair, Kasandora’s vassals sat down on either side, facing each other.

Grape wine, tea cakes, and fruits continued to be brought out one after another by maids.

The maids withdrew after delivering the cups of fruit and wine, then Kasandora leisurely reached his hand toward his glass goblet filled with red liquid and raised it up in front of him.

“In honor of the District Head, who graced us with his presence after a long journey.”
“I offer my thanks to the Lord, whose blessings and kindness are infinite, and to your Majesty.”

”Toast!” (x2)
“Toast!” (x4)

After savouring the rich scent and taste of the wine for a while, Aiba put his cup back on the table and looked in Kasandora’s direction with a grin. However, those who were watching him would probably notice that his eyes weren’t smiling at all.

“Then, your Majesty, I wonder, how has the plan for the invasion of the forest been progressing?”
Aiba’s tone was composed, and his mild expression didn’t falter, but nevertheless, his eyes harbored a cold, cruel light.

“Without any delay, we were able to measure the witches’ potential, fighting style, their defensive strength, and even deployed our troops in convenient places thanks to your suggestions. However, just the other day, we went through some bitter experiences.”

“Indeed, one or two lost battles won’t change much as long we are victorious in the war.”

“By commencing an attack and letting them respond, we can analyze our enemy’s war potential. Because we haven’t launched any unreasonable assaults from the start, we didn’t suffer any major losses. As soon as we finish analyzing their war potential through orthodox means, we will form an ideal strategy. Oh my, we have been nothing but amazed by your resourcefulness.”

Kasandora smiled as if being in a good humour.

“We are already familiar with the witches’ style of fighting. We also learned that their numbers are much more scarce than what we had assumed. Like this, we will be able crush the witches shortly.”

(I see. This king isn’t stupid, but he’s tactlessly frank. Not dense, but foolishly frank. After all, wouldn’t he amount to being some small landlord of a borderland? Still, to guide these people is our duty as the Children of God)
With Aiba’s face not giving an impression of his innermost thoughts, he asked

“Then, my king, what’s the extent of your current forces?”
“We plan to amass 2000 units.”

Indeed, he’s quite a hard-worker, isn’t he? – Aiba admired him inside.

The amount of 2000 is closest to the maximum force that Kasandora can mobilize. When someone is foolishly honest they probably won’t hold back in the slightest.

Aiba chuckled inside his heart as he was trying to stir up Kasandora; nevertheless, he wasn't stupid enough to let him learn about that.

Having a solemn attitude, he bowed down towards the king.

"Splitting one's military forces into small groups is a foolish idea. Only by intensive accumulation of force can one yield the greatest result. But of course, this is something your Majesty and the General should know the best."

"Umu. T-That's right. It's just like you say, Aiba-dono."

"By exterminating the witches living there, you will be able to connect my country and yours through that vast forest. Also, you will be able to gain an advantage over other countries…. you see?"

Aiba continued to incite Kasandora indirectly and nonchalantly like he had done til now.

A desire to act as a statesman lit inside the king's eyes.

"I hear that there is an abundant amount of lumber, wild plants, fruits, and wild animals inside of the forest. I also hear that mineral resources are lying unused there. For witches, those are useless things, and at the same time, pearls thrown before swine. We shall make effective use of them."

At Kasandora's speech filled with ardor, Aiba gave a refined smile.

"To exterminate the witches and to make humankind prosper, those are our Father's wishes."

By saying "Father", Kasandora meant the one and absolute God, whom they believed in. And then, those priests together with Aiba who served the God were also his children.

For that reason, the priests were referred to as the Children of God.

"Speaking of which, when can we begin our invasion of the forest?"

Kasandora looked at the man, dressed in a military uniform, next to him.

"Dear General, what's the exact date you will commence operations?"

The general, who jumped off his stool and lowered his head to the extent of his forehead touching the table, finally raised it and announced resolutely to the king and Aiba.

"Our plan is set to commence in ten days. At the break of dawn on the tenth day, we will depart. We will attack the fort located at the top of the big cliff and drive the witches away

from the forest. Then we intend to reinforce the seized fort, so as to create a foothold for entering the forest."

Kasandora and Aiba nodded in satisfaction.

With Kasandora's army setting off after 10 days, Naga, Harrigan, and the rest will have at least 10 days to make preparations. However, against the approaching forces of 2000, they will only have a force of 20 people. The difference between forces would normally cause anyone to despair.
What kind of tactic will Harrigan and Naga adopt?
A battle of 2000 against 20 has yet to begin.